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MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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by Brett Halliday

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by W.L. Fieldhouse

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by Ann Byerly

MIKE'S MAIL
Letters from Readers

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ODDS ON DEATH
by Brett Halliday

Shayne's client had a perfect system for winning at blackjack. Unfortunately, the casino owner had a perfect system for another type of killing — and the redheaded detective was one of the targets! 6

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MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAKERS

From MICHAEL CASSUTT (*The Squeeze*) comes this word:

> I'm new to writing (or selling regularly, at least) but have managed to publish fiction and non-fiction in OMNI, STARLOG, FUTURE LIFE, AMAZING SCIENCE FICTION and in the SF anthologies. I also have a book called SPACE WEAPONS forthcoming from Doubleday/Dolphin. My first mystery or suspense story appeared in MSMM in January 1977.

STANLEY WIATER (*The Toucher*) tells us:

> I was born in 1953. I am a free-lance magazine and newspaper feature/critic by trade, though my interests in writing have always leaned toward fiction rather than non-fiction. I enjoy writing horror and mystery stories, though I prefer horror because the story revolves around the protagonist meeting a dire end, while in a mystery the protagonist is involved with someone who has been killed.

BARRY N. MALZBERG (*Demolition, Inc.* with BILL PRONZINI) writes:

> We've sold four novels in collaboration, THE RUNNING OF BEASTS (Putnam, 1976), ACTS OF MERCY (Putnam, 1977), NIGHT SCREAMS (Playboy Press, 1979) and PROSE BOWL (St. Martin's, 1980) and about forty short stories to all of the mystery and science fiction magazines as well as a couple of original anthologies and the

MWA annual; we've also co-edited several anthologies including DARK SINS, DARK DREAMS: CRIME IN SCIENCE FICTION (Doubleday, 1978) and THE END OF SUMMER: SCIENCE FICTION IN THE FIFTIES (Ace, 1979). Bill is 37 and lives in San Francisco, I am 41 and live (if you call this living) in Teaneck, New Jersey; that we've been able to do work of such quantity and ambition at 3100 miles distance over so many years is tribute ot our: a) original naivete at what we would have to go through, b) our breadth of spirit. DEMOLITION will mark only my second appearance in SHAYNE in six years; in the early days though, I sold a number of stories to Leo and Cylvia including THE INTERCEPTOR which with its appearances in BEST DETECTIVE ANNUAL: 1973 and a new Random House Hitchcock anthology (as well as in one of my own collections) is probably my best short story in the mystery market.

ANN BYERLY (*The Bouchercon Report*) says:

I'm a sophomore at Goucher College in Towson, Maryland, a European and Asian History major. I have taken flute for nine years, am in the Johns Hopkins concert band and earned my living for a month in Washington, DC as a street musician in Georgetown. I have met and spoken with the only known Sherlockian in Italy during a concert tour in America's Youth in Concert orchestra in 1978. I am a Sherlockian, the New Materials Editor for *Baker Street Miscellanea* (a quarterly anthology of Sherlockiana). I am a redhead and have founded a Red-Headed League, after the Sherlock Holmes story of the same title, with members as far-flung as Pennsylvania, Alabama, California, Oklahoma, Canada, and Denmark. Our newsletter, which I edit, publish, etc., is *The Red Herring.*

Odds On Death

by BRETT HALLIDAY

THERE WAS A SLIGHT CHILL IN THE AIR as Michael Shayne strode down Flagler Street toward the building where his office was located. It was cool for Miami, even in the middle of winter, and Shayne didn't like it much. His left shoulder was throbbing slightly, the souvenir of a bullet wound of a few weeks earlier, and the dank air only made it worse.

So Shayne's mood was almost as foreboding as the cloudy skies when he came into the office. Lucy Hamilton, she of the brown hair and soft eyes, looked up from her desk in the outer office and said, "How did lunch go, Michael?"

Shayne hung his hat on the rack just inside the door and grunted, "Not too good. That guy Gilbert is a pain. I don't blame Tim for not liking him."

The lunch that the big private detective had just come from had been at the Beef House, one of his favorite places usually. Today, though, it had been the scene of his first meeting with Jack Gilbert, a new reporter for the Miami *Daily News*.

Timothy Rourke, the *News*'s top writer and one of Shayne's oldest friends in Miami, had made the introductions. "Mike," he said, "this is Jack Gilbert, the new man in the City Room. Jack, meet Mike Shayne."

Gilbert was young, with a shock of rumpled sandy hair and a broad, open face. He shook Shayne's hand excitedly. "I'm glad to meet you, Mr. Shayne. I've been looking forward to this."

Shayne returned the pressure and said noncommittally, "I've been reading your work."

That was the truth. Shayne had been reading the young man's stories in the paper and fuming. Many of the stories had been about Shayne and his involvement in the Black Lotus affair, which was only now fading from the public's consciousness. Shayne had sometimes thought that Tim Rourke made his adventures more lurid than they actually were, but Rourke was the soul of restraint compared to Gilbert. He was getting sick and tired of references to him as "Miami's Superstar Private Eye," "the two-fisted redheaded gumshoe," and the like.

"Jack's going to be covering the crime beat more and more," Rourke said, "so I thought the two of you should get together." Shayne could tell by the look in his friend's eyes that Rourke had thought no such thing. Someone had pressured him into this meeting, that someone probably being Gilbert.

The young reporter bubbled effusively all through the meal, mainly holding forth on the place of journalism in the world. Shayne had to

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keep a tight rein on his temper when the kid started talking about how the press was the only trustworthy group around in these days of corrupt politicians and crooked cops. Shayne knew better. He was glad that Gilbert stopped short of making any snide comments about Miami's Chief of Police, Will Gentry, as he had done in print a few times.

After the meal, Gilbert excused himself to go to the Men's Room, and Shayne leaned over the table. He said to Rourke in a low voice, "What gives, Tim? This guy's no newspaperman."

"One of the new breed," Rourke sighed, lighting a cigarette. "Full of himself and proud of it. He would never have made it in the business when I was starting out."

"How does he make it now? He's not half the reporter you are."

Rourke smiled wryly. "Thanks for the vote of confidence. Wish everybody else felt that way. The word is, Mike, that the paper is going to be sold very shortly, and Gilbert is some relation to the chairman of the board of the company that's going to buy it."

"Nepotism," Shayne snorted.

"You got it. And here he comes."

Lunch couldn't have been over soon enough to suit Shayne, and now that he was back in his office, he could still taste the unpleasantness of the encounter. He started to tell Lucy about it when she interrupted him.

"There's a man waiting in your office, Michael. He told me he wanted to hire you, but he didn't tell me what it was about."

"Did he give you a name?"

"Arthur Tarrant."

Shayne frowned and shook his head. The name meant nothing to him. "I guess I'd better see what he wants," he said, then opened the door into his private office.

THE MAN IN THE CLIENT'S CHAIR IN FRONT OF THE DESK stood up and turned around to greet him. He put out a hand and said, "Hello, Mr. Shayne. My name is Arthur Tarrant. I'm glad to meet you."

Shayne returned the handshake and studied the man briefly. He was fairly tall, dressed in a conservative grey suit. His hair was silver and well-groomed, his face friendly, with a few lines around the eyes. Shayne put his age around fifty-five.

"Have a seat, Mr. Tarrant," Shayne said, going behind the desk, "and tell me why you want to retain the services of a private detective."

Tarrant sat down and took a deep breath. "I suspect someone is trying to kill me, Mr. Shayne. I want you to prevent that."

"Naturally," Shayne said, tipping a cigarette into his mouth and lighting it. He hoped his foul mood wasn't too obvious to Tarrant. "And just who is it that's trying to kill you."

"Have you ever heard of a man called Tony Parrott?"

Shayne sat up suddenly, his eyes narrowing. "Tony Parrott?" he said. "Sure. What the hell does a guy like you have to do with Tony Parrott?"

"He wants me dead. I've made him look foolish."

"That wasn't a bright thing to do." Shayne leaned back and let smoke trickle from his nostrils. His left hand strayed up to pull on his earlobe.

He knew about Anthony Parrotti, a.k.a. Tony Parrott, all right. Stories had been circulating along the grapevine for the last few months about a gambling ship that the Mob had established several miles off Miami Beach, and according to the rumors, it was being run by a hard man the Mob had imported named Anthony Parrotti. Shayne had had no dealings with the man, no call to investigate the alleged gambling ship. Until now.

"I think you'd better tell me all about it," he said to Tarrant. "From everything I've heard, Tony Parrott isn't a good man to have mad at you."

"I can attest to that," Tarrant said. He twisted his fingers together nervously. "You see, Mr. Shayne, I'm a professor at the University. I teach mathematics." Somehow, Shayne wasn't surprised to hear him say that. Tarrant had the look of a professor. "In my spare time, I've conducted many studies of statistics and probabilities. And I've invented several systems for gambling."

Shayne held up a hand. "Wait a minute. You're not going to try to tell me that these systems work, are you? No system does. The odds are always rigged in favor of the house, and there's no way to beat them in the long run."

"Perhaps not," Tarrant admitted. "But by using the system that I have invented, a man can postpone that inevitable turn of the odds long enough to win a fortune. All he has to do is quit before the odds change."

"I still can't buy it," Shayne said, shaking his head. "I've seen too many of these foolproof systems fall apart."

"I would have agreed with you before."

"Before what?"

"Before I used my system to win $75,000 on Parrott's gambling ship

playing blackjack," Tarrant said simply.

Shayne let out a low whistle. "I never knew a system to pay off that well before. No wonder Parrotti's mad at you."

Tarrant smiled thinly. "I should have known better, should have known that a man who runs a illegal gambling ship wouldn't want anyone winning a big payoff like that. The fact that I did it in one night made it worse."

Shayne nodded. "A report about it probably went straight to Parrotti's bosses in the Northeast. It would make him look bad, especially considering who you are, not even a professional."

"Just a crackpot schoolteacher with a crazy system," Tarrant said. "That's the way he put it. That was before I won the money. Parrotti began to watch me after a while, when it became obvious I was winning regularly, and I could tell he was getting angrier and angrier."

"Did he threaten you?"

"Not directly. He did say that people who get mixed up in things they shouldn't usually wind up dead. He sounded like he meant it."

"I'm sure he did," Shayne said grimly. "You may be in trouble, all right, Mr. Tarrant. Have you considered going to the police?"

"If I did, I would have to admit that I had been gambling illegally. My position at the University would be in jeopardy if that ever got around."

Shayne nodded. "I see your point." His craggy red brows drew down into a frown. "If you don't mind my asking, just why did you get mixed up with Parrotti anyway?"

"I wanted to test my system," Tarrant explained. "And don't think that we professors are immune to the lure of money. We're not terribly well paid, you know."

Shayne turned slightly to glance out the window. As he saw the clouds in the sky outside, he realized that much of his bad mood had vanished. Tarrant's story was an interesting one, and Shayne found himself liking the man.

He looked back at Tarrant and said, "I wish I could help you, Mr. Tarrant, but I don't think there's much I can do. I can recommend several other agencies, though, that can give you around-the-clock protection. Tony Parrotti will probably cool off after a while."

Tarrant's face fell. "I was hoping that you would go see him, perhaps tell him that you were on the case. I know that you have quite a reputation —"

"Not big enough to scare off a guy like Parrotti just like that," Shayne broke in. "I'm sorry. I really think, though, that if you get yourself some bodyguards, Parrotti will lay off. Seventy-five grand is

quite a chunk of money, but the Mob can afford to lose that much every day of the week."

"You don't understand, Mr. Shayne, I don't intend to stop. I'm planning to go back to the *Silver Lagoon*, that's Parrotti's ship, and win some more."

Shayne's frown deepened. "You can't be serious. That's a good way to get killed for sure."

"Not if you help me. I'm sure Parrotti respects you — "

"No," Shayne said curtly. "I'm sorry."

Tarrant sighed and stood up wearily. "Of course. If that's the way you feel, I'll respect your wishes. Thank you for your time, Mr. Shayne."

Shayne walked with Tarrant into the outer office, where he said, "Give Mr. Tarrant the names and addresses of a couple of our best competitors, Angel. I think he needs a larger agency."

Lucy complied quickly, handing Tarrant a card on which she had jotted the information down. The professor took a grey Homburg off the rack and settled it on his head, saying, "Thank you again, Mr. Shayne, and it was nice meeting you, Miss Hamilton." He opened the door and stepped into the hall.

Shayne saw Tarrant stop in his tracks, eyes widening in fear. The big detective took a step toward him, saying, "What is it, Mr. — "

A gun blasted.

Plaster flew from the wall opposite the door, and Tarrant let out a yelp. Shayne lunged forward into the hall, one hand grabbing the professor's arm while the other snatched his pistol from its shoulder holster. He pivoted, bodily throwing Tarrant back through the open door into the office.

Shayne's keen eyes had taken in the scene in a split-second. He saw the man at the far end of the hall, holding the elevator door open with one hand while he aimed a gun with the other. The pistol in his hand spat lead again, and Shayne ducked as he heard the whine of the bullet over his head. He snapped his gun up and triggered two quick shots.

Both of them missed, slamming into the walls, and then the gunman was in the elevator, the door sliding shut behind him. Shayne sprinted down the hall as the elevator started its descent.

There was a flight of stairs next to the elevator, and Shayne went down them at a run, taking two and three steps in one bound. Still, he knew that the gunman had a few second's lead on him, and that the elevator had only one floor to cover.

When he burst out into the lobby of the building, he caught a

glimpse of a man vanishing through the entrance. Shayne went after him, oblivious of the stares he drew.

As he pushed out through the doors, Shayne cast his eyes both ways. To his right, a car was pulling away from the curb rapidly. The rear door was just shutting, and Shayne knew that the gunman had had a driver waiting.

Shayne cursed and craned his head, trying to get a look at the license plate of the fleeing car. There was too much traffic in the street, too many pedestrians on the sidewalk, to risk blasting away at it. And the license plate, when he finally saw it, was obscured with mud. He reholstered his gun and stalked back into the building.

Arthur Tarrant was sitting at Lucy's desk when Shayne entered the office, while Lucy poured him a cup of coffee. The mathematics professor was pale, and Shayne could see his fingers trembling. This was probably the first time he had ever been shot at.

"Looks like Parrotti meant business," Shayne said tightly. "He'll wish he'd never tried anything here."

"What . . . What do you mean, Mr. Shayne?" Tarrant asked.

"I mean I don't like it when people shoot at potential clients. I'm going to take your case, Mr. Tarrant, and see what we can do about pinning back Tony Parrott's feathers."

II

THE THREATENING SKIES DID NOTHING BUT THREATEN, and the Miami Beach night life was in full swing when Mike Shayne crossed Biscayne Bay that night. He pointed his Buick toward the Laguna Pier, a beachfront restaurant that was rumored to be the jumping off place for the gambling ship *Silver Lagoon*. Shayne had found out that much from several calls he made to underworld contacts. The word was that anyone who wanted to gamble should show up at the Pier with two hundred dollars. That bought them a launch ride out to the ship, anchored several miles off shore, and a return ticket for the trip back.

Tarrant had given Shayne a five hundred dollar retainer check and then promised to go home and stay there. Shayne had followed him unobserved, and no one else had made any attempt to harm Tarrant.

And no one would, if Shayne had anything to say about it. He drove past the luxury hotels that lined the beach and then pulled into the nearly full parking lot of the Laguna Pier. He had two hundred dollars in his pocket, and it was going to buy him a confab with Parrotti.

Most of the Laguna Pier was built out over the water. Shayne

entered through double glass doors and was greeted by a girl in a long, clinging gown. She was beautiful, with a stunning figure and golden hair, but her face was bored. She put a mechanical smile on it and asked, "Table for one, sir, or would you prefer the bar?"

"The bar," Shayne told her, then followed her swinging hips through an archway into a shadowy bar. She gave him another smile and went back to her post.

Shayne settled onto a padded stool and raised a finger at the bartender, who came right over. Shayne told him, "Martell, ice water on the side."

"Yes, sir."

Shayne glanced around at the bar. There were quite a few patrons, even though it was early in the evening, and the restaurant seemed to be busy, too. He heard disco music coming from outside, and knew that the dance floor suspended over the waves was probably packed, since the evening had turned out nice after the gloomy day.

The bartender brought his drink. Shayne sipped the cognac, nodded approvingly, and the man said, "Will there be anything else, sir?"

Shayne dropped a bill on the bar and said in a cheerful voice, "I hear you run a few sight-seeing boats every night. I was wondering if I could still get on one."

"That's possible, sir. You're aware of the fare?"

Shayne held up two fingers. This time the bartender was the one nodding approvingly.

"I'll see what I can do, sir," the man said. He went down to the other end of the bar, lifted a house phone, and spoke into it for a few moments. Then he came back to Shayne, beaming.

"There's still plenty of room. The launch should be leaving in five or ten minutes, so you got here just in time. It'll be leaving from the pier outside, so you can either wait here or go on outside, whatever you prefer."

"Can I take my drink with me?" Shayne asked.

"Of course."

"See you later, then. And thanks."

Shayne picked up the snifter of brandy and the glass of ice water and strolled out through the archway. The bartender must have made some kind of high sign behind him, because the blonde from the door intercepted him and said, "Just go right on through to the dance floor, sir. The boat leaves from the dock out there."

"Thanks," Shayne said. He was being treated very nicely, and no one had even asked to see the color of his money. That could be because most people knew better than to play games with Parrotti,

except for the kind that he ran on his ship. Anyone who tried to get aboard and couldn't pay the toll would be dealt with accordingly.

The dance floor was crowded, so Shayne bypassed it to head straight for the steps leading down to a dock. There were other people waiting there, all of them well-dressed and well-fed. The upper class, who could afford to drop some bucks at the tables for the thrill of actually visiting an old-fashioned gambling ship run by a man reputed to be a gangster.

There was a good-sized launch bobbing gently in the water, and after Shayne had stood on the dock for a few minutes with the other potential players, a man in a tuxedo appeared. He was slick and handsome and fairly oozed charm as he said, "Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to our little nightly cruise aboard the *Laguna II*. I'm Ted Hampton, your host for the evening. Now, if you'll all hop aboard the launch . . . "

The launch's crew had appeared from below docks, and they helped the customers onto the launch. Shayne noticed the crowd had grown. Many of the people who had been in the bar earlier were now boarding the launch. He stepped onto it lithely and found a seat.

It took a couple of minute for everyone to get on board, then the launch put out to sea. Ted Hampton was keeping up his cheery, mindless chatter, as members of the crew began to circulate among the guests. Shayne saw money changing hands and reflected on the sagacity of the timing. No one would try to crash this party, not when he could be tossed in the drink if he didn't have his two hundred dollars. Shayne forked over his fare to a hardfaced crewman, then lit a cigarette and settled back to enjoy the ride.

And it was enjoyable. The clouds had parted enough to allow a nearly full moon to shine through, attended by several stars. It was cool on the launch, the breeze whipping into Shayne's face, but not unpleasantly so. He would have enjoyed the trip more, though, if he had really been going for an evening's entertainment, like those around him, instead of to deliver a warning.

His eyes picked out the running lights of the *Silver Lagoon* before most of the other passengers did. As they drew closer, he saw that it was lit up like a Christmas tree, and he heard music drifting over the water as the launch cut its engine to coast up next to the ship.

The *Silver Lagoon* was big, bigger than Shayne had expected. It looked like a refurbished ocean liner of the type that left Miami regularly for Caribbean cruises. The launch pulled up beside a landing and a ladder, and the passengers started to disembark, aided by the crew members, who saw that no one fell in the water and ruined an

expensive evening gown or a velvet tuxedo.

Shayne was thankful that they were leaving the insipid noise of Ted Hampton behind. Somewhere on the ship, a band was playing old standards, and as Shayne climbed up the ladder, really a steep flight of stairs, he heard them swing into a rendition of *"I Can't Get Started With You."*

Stewards in maroon jackets and white pants were showing the customers into the gaming rooms of the ship, and one of them came up to Shayne. The young man said, "Welcome to the *Silver Lagoon*, sir. What games would you prefer? We have every type of gambling known to man." His voice was proud.

"I doubt that," Shayne said dryly. "What about Russian Roulette?"

"In the lounge on C deck," the steward said. "Simulated, of course."

Shayne quirked an eyebrow. "Of course. Listen, son, what I'd really like to do is see your boss."

"The head steward? I'll see if he's available — "

"No," Shayne cut in. "I mean Tony Parrott."

The young man frowned. "I'm sure I don't know what you mean, sir."

Shayne stepped closer and let the steward see the corner of another hundred dollar bill in his hand. "I'm sure you do," he said slowly. "Now you can take that hundred and tell me where to find Tony, or I can cause a big enough ruckus to get to see him that way. You'd rather make the money than get a broken nose, wouldn't you?"

The steward looked thoughtful for a moment, then said, "Since you explained it so clearly . . . There's a door right over there." He motioned slightly with his head. "Go down the hall behind it. You'll find the boss. Or rather, he'll find you."

"Either way," Shayne said. "It doesn't matter to me."

The steward vanished almost as fast as the hundred.

Shayne opened the door and slipped through it. No one was paying any attention to him, with all the gaiety going on, but as soon as he was in the companionway behind the door, he was noticed. A burly man in a dinner jacket was leaning against the wall further down the corridor, and he straightened up as soon as he saw Shayne. His hand moved closer to his opened coat.

"What the hell do you want, bud?" he said.

Shayne strolled toward him casually. He could see another door on the other side of the man, this one a fancy curved panel of mahogany,

and Shayne was willing to bet that Tony Parrott was on the other side of it.

"I came to see Tony," Shayne said, his voice breezy. "Tell him I'm here, will you?"

The guard's eyes flicked toward that door for just an instant, but that was enough to confirm Shayne's guess. He looked back at Shayne and frowned. "I don't know you, mister, but I know I ain't seen you around here before. Why don't you just get moving?"

Shayne gestured. "You mean before you grab that gun you're wearing?"

This time the man's eyes followed Shayne's gesture and fell to the opening of his coat, where his hand was hovering.

The distraction was all Shayne needed.

He hit the guard in the face as hard as he could.

The man slammed back against the wall as blood spurted from his nose. He was groping for his gun when Shayne stepped closer and drove a fist into his belly. He doubled over, and his chin ran right into Shayne's bony knee.

The fancy door was thrown open as the guard slowly folded up and fell to the floor. The man in the door glared out at Shayne and said fiercely, "What the hell's going on out there?"

"Just getting acquainted with your boy here, Tony," Shayne said, running a thumbnail along his jawline. "He took to feeling ill."

ANTHONY PARROTTI WAS IMPECCABLY DRESSED and proud of it. His white suit fit right in with the atmosphere of the gambling ship, and it set off his tanned skin and glossy dark hair. He wore a pair of glasses, which he whipped off angrily, then said to Shayne, "Who are you, and what gives you the right to come in here and assault my employees?"

"My name is Mike Shayne. If you're so upset, why don't you steer this ship back into territorial waters and call the Coast Guard?"

Parrotti's stare was cold and hard as he looked at Shayne. After a moment, he said, "I recognize you now. You're that hotshot private shamus. Well, you don't carry any weight here, Shayne, so you'd better have a good explanation for this."

"I've got a damn good one," Shayne said. "Can I come in and tell you about it?"

Parrotti stepped away from the door grudgingly and ushered Shayne into the room. It was expensively furnished, panelled in dark woods, and had a huge desk in the center of it. "This is my office," Parrotti explained. "Now let's hear it, Shayne."

The man settled in a comfortable chair behind the desk as he spoke. Shayne leaned over the desk, putting his palms flat on its polished surface, and said, "Listen, Parrotti, I'm working for Arthur Tarrant now. I saw that little stunt you pulled this afternoon. And I'm here to tell you that if you try to pull anything else, you'll be dealing with me."

A slight sneer curled Parrotti's lips. "I'm not even going to bother denying your crazy charges, Shayne. But just tell me, why am I supposed to be afraid of you?"

Shayne took a cigar from a humidor on the desk without asking, rolled it between his fingers appraisingly, and then put it in his pocket. He said, "Because I can make a lot of trouble for you. I've got a lot of friends on all the police forces around here."

"I'm not in their jurisdiction."

"Your people have to go ashore sometime. You have to have supplies delivered out here. There are enough little laws to tie up your operation without ever touching you, Parrotti, and you know it. You've kept a fairly low profile so far, and you haven't been bothered much. You'll have to decide if one man is worth all the hassle you might be getting into."

Parrotti looked a little less arrogant. He considered, then said. "What if nothing happens to him?"

"Then you'll probably keep on having little or no trouble yourself. Sound like a good deal?"

"I still don't know what you're talking about, but I'll think about it, Shayne."

Shayne said, "Good. You do that," and started for the door.

"There's just one thing," Parrotti said, stopping him.

"Yeah, what's that?" Shayne growled.

"You came in here and roughed up one of my boys. We don't like that. My foot's resting on a button right now. I press it, and we've got ten guys in here in a couple of seconds, all of them ready to feed you to the fish if I tell them to. What's to stop me from doing just that?"

Shayne noticed a deck of cards lying on the desk, and he gave in to the wild impulse that flashed into his mind. He pointed to the cards and said, "I'll play you a little game. How about blackjack? You win, you call your boys and we see where the cards fall then. I win, and you give me your personal assurance of safe conduct back to shore."

A gleam came into Parrotti's eyes, and Shayne knew that he had found a true gambler, the kind who couldn't resist a bet. And these stakes were high.

"All right," Parrotti said. "I'll deal."

"Sure," Shayne said lightly. He didn't think Parrotti would cheat.

That would take all the sport out of it."

Parrotti shuffled deftly, dealt Shayne a card and then dropped a ten face up in front of him. Shayne raised the corner of his card and saw a seven looking at him. Parrotti dealt him another one and then gave himself an eight. A smile curled Parrotti's thin lips.

"Well, Shayne?" he said.

Shayne looked at his second card. The two of clubs. Nine to Parrotti's eighteen. Eighteen was enough to win in most games, Shayne knew.

"Hit me," he said calmly.

The third card fell on the desk. Shayne scooped up all three of them. The new one was a four. He raised an eyebrow and said, "Again."

His nerves were steady as he picked up the card, but he would have been lying if he had said he wasn't beginning to worry. Anything over an eight would be too much.

A five . . . Eighteen, and Parrotti held eighteen. But Parrotti was dealing, and the dealer always won any ties.

"Pay nineteen," Parrotti said mockingly.

Shayne's throat felt tight as he said, "One more time."

The card made a slithering noise as it slid across the desk to Shayne. He picked it up without hesitation.

It was too late to hesitate now.

He grinned and dropped the card face up on the desk, spreading the others behind it. "Pay nineteen," he said.

Parrotti stared at the ace of spades and said, "I'll be damned."

Shayne just smiled.

III

TEN MINUTES LATER, HE WAS BACK IN THE LAUNCH, heading for the mainland. Parrotti had ordered the captain of the launch to make a special trip and to return as soon as possible. Shayne wasn't the only passenger, though. There were several of the ship's customers who had already lost all their money and were more than ready to go back, crestfallen. Shayne was glad they were along; Parrotti would be less likely to have his men try anything with witnesses present.

As the launch cut through the waves toward the lights of Miami Beach, Shayne pondered the events of the evening. The results of this visit could turn out several different ways.

Parrotti was angered by Shayne's brazen invasion of his office, that was certain. The gambling boss might respond by sending his men

after Shayne. That was fine with the big redhead. He could hold his own with Parrotti's men, and if he could nab some of them in an attempt to harm him, they might implicate Parrotti in order to save themselves. If that happened, it would work out just fine. Parrotti would be out of the way and wouldn't be able to cause any more trouble for Arthur Tarrant.

Or Parrotti might just decide the whole thing wasn't worth it, now that Shayne had entered the picture. Parrotti was a gambler; he knew when to cut his losses. That was a possibility, too.

When the launch pulled into the dock at the Laguna Pier a little later, Shayne saw that the place was still busy. He jumped from the launch to the dock easily, waved a hand at the launch crew as he gave them a sardonic grin, and mounted the steps to the dance floor.

Making his way through the still-discoing crowd, Shayne headed for the exit. The lovely blonde was still at her station there, and the smile she gave him was a little less mechanical now.

"You're back early," she said as Shayne approached. "Is anything wrong?"

"No," Shayne grinned. "It just didn't take me long to conduct my business."

The girl was obviously curious, but curiosity was a quality that had to be repressed in her line of work. Some impulses have to be given into, though. As Shayne started past her, she put a hand on his arm and stopped him.

"I get off work in about an hour," she said, "if you'd care to come back by and pick me up. Or you could wait in the bar."

There was no mistaking the invitation in her eyes. Shayne was giving her proposal the consideration it deserved when his eyes fell on a mirror behind the girl that gave him a good view of the whole room. He saw the launch captain talking to the head waiter, and then both of them sent hard looks in the direction of his back. Shayne decided that the atmosphere around here might not be so friendly anymore.

"I'll have to take a raincheck on that," he said to the blonde. "Previous engagements."

She pouted nicely. "That's your decision. But . . . if you change your mind, I'll be here."

"Thanks," Shayne said, slipped a bill into her hand. "See you around."

He strolled on out of the club, conscious of more eyes on him than just the girl's. There was a prickling on the back of his neck, and suddenly, he was convinced that Parrotti was not going to let the affront go unpunished.

SHAYNE CUT ACROSS THE PARKING LOT RAPIDLY, heading for his Buick. The place was rather dimly lit, and this would be a good place for an ambush. He kept his eyes and ears wide open, but nothing had happened by the time he reached his car.

He pulled out of the lot and turned north on Ocean Boulevard, heading for the County Causeway. That was the quickest way back to Miami and his apartment. He wanted to give Arthur Tarrant a call when he got there and let the professor know what had happened on the *Silver Lagoon*.

Shayne watched the headlights behind him carefully, looking for a pair that seemed to be following him. If he was being tailed, though, he couldn't spot it. That meant that Parrotti had either let him slip away, or if he was being tailed, it was by an expert.

Turning the wheel smoothly, Shayne piloted the Buick onto the causeway, accelerating up the slope of it. The sodium lights that lined the big bridge cast a yellow-orange glow over its surface.

The multi-lane causeway had only a few vehicles on it, and Shayne was about halfway on the crest of it when he saw a new pair of headlights appear behind him. The car they belonged to was streaking up the bridge, rapidly closing the gap between itself and Shayne's Buick.

Shayne watched the lights in his rearview mirror and cursed. They had picked a good place for it. There was nowhere for him to go but straight ahead, not until he reached the other end of the bridge, almost a mile ahead.

Shayne increased the pressure on the accelerator and felt himself pressed back against the seat slightly as the big car picked up speed. People had told him that he should trade the Buick in on a smaller car that got better gas mileage, but it was times like that that the car more than paid for itself with its power and durability.

He was going faster now, but the car behind him was still gaining on him. Shayne swerved around a few cars that were going the same direction, horn blaring. He had just swung back over after passing the last one when he glanced at the mirror and saw the flashes from the pursuing car. He heard the spang of a slug ricocheting off the body of his car.

The Buick reached the top of the causeway and surged up off the surface of the road for a second before jolting down on the other side. Shayne had to fight the wheel to keep it going straight, but he regained control of it in a few seconds. The car's speed picked up even more, now that they were going downhill again.

The other car was close enough now that Shayne could see it in the glare of the sodium lights. It was a sports car of some kind, un-

doubtedly souped up so that it could outrun almost anything. But the way it was closing in on him, Shayne knew that he would never make the other end of the causeway before it caught up with him. Once they were close enough, they could shoot out his tires, and at this speed, there would be no way he could control the Buick if he had a blowout.

So there was only one thing left to do. Shayne was grateful that the lanes going in the other direction were clear.

His foot slammed into the brake pedal and he spun the steering wheel desperately. He tried not to think about the danger of this maneuver, tried not to visualize his car rolling madly down the causeway and into the bay . . .

The tires of the Buick screeched and smoked as the brakes took hold. The rear end of the car swung around, trying to get ahead of the front, and Shayne let it do just that. He went spinning over into the other lanes, the force of the sudden, slewing turn sending the car toward the guard rail. Shayne was facing back in the direction he had come from now, and when he glanced to his right, he saw the railing looming up.

The right rear fender of the Buick slammed into the guard rail, but the rail held, and Shayne found himself sitting still, almost unbelievably.

There was no time to think about how lucky he had been, however. The other car was almost even with him, the driver of it standing on his brakes, too, while a man in the rear seat snapped shots at Shayne. The big detective felt the slap of wind from a bullet that came through his open window and sliced by his head, and then he had his own gun out, triggering rapidly.

The other car rocketed past him, unable to stop as quick since it had been going even faster, and Shayne raked it with gunfire. Even over the roar of his pistol, he heard the sound of one of his bullets hitting a tire and causing a blow out. The sports car slid to the side, suddenly out of control.

It smashed almost head-on into the guard rail on the other side of the causeway, and this time there was no way it could hold. It crumpled and then gave, and suddenly the little car was falling end over end. Shayne leaped out of the Buick and raced across the asphalt roadway, reaching the other side in time to see the huge splash the car made as it hit the surface of Biscayne Bay.

Shayne holstered his gun and stalked grimly back to his car. It was doubtful that anyone could have survived a crash like that, but he pulled the receiver of his radio-telephone from under the dash and called the police and the harbor patrol. They could search for bodies or survivors.

Shayne reported it as an accident, pure and simple, with the other driver losing control and going off the bridge. He knew how reliable the other witnesses to the firefight were likely to be, so he hung up and headed for his apartment. He wanted to stay out of the limelight in this business if he possibly could.

Parrotti would know what had happened, though, when he learned that his men had gone into the bay.

And that would be just one more score that he would have to even with Shayne.

Shayne gave a mental shrug. He wished he had been able to take the men alive, but there hadn't been any time for finesse. He had been too busy trying to stay alive himself.

THE FIRST THING HE DID when he reached his apartment was to pour several fingers of Martell into a tumbler. Then he tossed his hat onto the table, sat down in his battered old armchair, and sipped the drink while he dialed Tarrant's number.

After three rings, the receiver on the other end was picked up and Shayne heard Tarrant say, "Hello."

"This is Mike Shayne, Mr. Tarrant. I thought I'd better let you know what happened tonight."

"Yes, Mr. Shayne? Did you see Parrotti?"

"I saw him, all right, and I warned him that he'd better lay off. Then he played a little game of blackjack. I won. He let me off the ship without killing me first."

There was a moment of silence on the other end, then Tarrant said, "You certainly do like to live dangerously, Mr. Shayne."

"Occupational hazard. What about you? Have any trouble tonight?"

"Not a bit. Everything has been quiet."

Shayne wondered whether he should tell Tarrant about the incident on the causeway. He decided abruptly that the professor had a right to know. "I did have some trouble on the way home, though," he said. "I think Parrotti sent a couple of men after me. We tangled, and they wound up going off the causeway and into Biscayne Bay."

He heard Tarrant's sharp intake of breath. "You killed them?"

"Maybe. Odds are good that I did. It seemed like the thing to do at the time."

"What — what will we do now?"

"You'll lay low for a while, and I'll handle Parrotti. He's going to be mad about what happened to his boys, but he knows he was taking a chance when he sent them after me. I'll get a message to him through the grapevine that there'll be no hard feelings if he'll just put a stop

to everything right now. You just stay away from the *Silver Lagoon* and that club down at the pier, and you should be all right."

There was agitation in Tarrant's voice when he spoke again. "You don't understand, Mr. Shayne. I can't stay away from the *Silver Lagoon*. I have to go out there again tomorrow night and win some more money."

Shayne couldn't believe his ears. "What?" he exclaimed. "You go near that boat now and you'll be setting yourself up as a clay pigeon."

"I know, and I'm sorry. But there's nothing I can do about it. Will you come with me, Mr. Shayne?"

Shayne frowned at the phone. Just because Tarrant was crazy, that didn't mean *he* had to be. Before he could say as much, Tarrant went on, "I promise you, Mr. Shayne, I have a good reason. If . . . if you'll come to my house tomorrow afternoon, I'll explain it to you."

Shayne was tempted to tell him no outright, but he was curious what could make a man be so foolhardy. Almost before he knew what he was saying, he told Tarrant, "All right. I'll be there. But it had better be a damn good reason."

"It is, Mr. Shayne," Tarrant said quietly. "I don't know of a better one."

IV

SHAYNE PULLED UP IN FRONT OF TARRANT'S HOUSE around two o'clock the next afternoon. It was a small brick house in a fairly good neighborhood, the kind of place that looked like a college professor could afford fairly well. It was nowhere near fancy, though it looked well kept. There was a six-year-old sedan parked in the garage. Whatever Tarrant needed the money for, it wasn't for opulent, luxurious living.

Shayne crossed the neatly mown lawn and pressed a door bell set in the facing. The inside door opened a moment later, and Tarrant said, "Hello, Mr. Shayne. Please, come in." He pushed the screen open.

Shayne stepped into the house and found himself in a small foyer. A living room opened off one side of it, and a hall led back into the rest of the house. Tarrant led Shayne down the hall into a den, the walls of which were covered with full bookshelves.

The mathematics teacher was dressed more casually today, in slacks and a pullover sweater. He carried a pipe in one hand, and he looked fairly relaxed. In fact, he looked a lot more relaxed than Shayne felt. Tarrant didn't look at all like a man who was planning to further antagonize a powerful representative of organized crime.

"Please have a seat," Tarrant said, waving a hand at a comfortable-looking sofa. Shayne settled down on it while Tarrant sat in a rocking chair.

Shayne took his cigarettes out, raised an eyebrow at Tarrant, and lit one when his host nodded. Blowing smoke through his nose, he said, "You promised you'd tell me the reason you're going back to the *Silver Lagoon.*"

"That's right," Tarrant nodded. "You think I've lost my mind, don't you?"

"I didn't say that."

"You didn't have to. No, Mr. Shayne, I assure you I'm sane. I know I'll be taking a terrible chance by going out there and winning again. But that doesn't change the fact that I have to."

Shayne sat forward and clasped his hands together in front of him. "You're awfully certain you'll win again."

Tarrant smiled thinly. "The system insures it. The odds haven't built up enough yet to change my projections. I can win quite a bit more money before I have to quit or start losing."

"Why do you need it?" Shayne asked. "You've taken them for seventy-five thousand already. What's this reason you've got?"

Tarrant stood up slowly, and Shayne could suddenly see that he looked like a man who had been carrying a burden for a long time. "If you'll stay right here, Mr. Shayne," he said, "I'll show you."

Tarrant went down another hall and turned a corner, taking him out of Shayne's vision. Shayne sat there for a moment, then stood up and ambled over to the bookshelves on the wall. He studied the titles for a moment and saw that most of them were mathematics textbooks or similar works. Tarrant's name on the spine of one of the books caught his eye, and he took it down. The title page revealed that the professor had co-authored the book.

He was returning the book to its proper place when he heard the sound behind him. It was only a slight metallic sound but it was enough to make him turn around quickly.

There was a wheelchair facing him, and sitting in it was a lovely young girl. She said, "Hello, Mr. Shayne. I'm Stacy Tarrant. My father said for me to introduce myself to you."

Shayne hoped he didn't look as surprised as he felt. He nodded and said, "Hello, Miss Tarrant. I'm Mike Shayne."

"I know," the girl said. "My father told me. But even if he hadn't, I would have recognized you anyway. I've read about you in the *News* a lot, and I've even read some of those books they used to write about you."

There was a sparkle in Stacy Tarrant's eyes, and she was looking at him like he was ten feet tall. He said quickly, "You can't believe everything those guys write about me, especially that new reporter at the paper. Writers tend to dress things up sometimes."

"I'm sure they didn't exaggerate too much."

Shayne looked at the girl and felt a little awkward. He didn't quite know how to proceed. Stacy was in her early twenties, he judged, with long brown hair that framed a lovely face. She was wearing a red blouse that rose and fell over the thrust of her high, full breasts. From the waist up, she was as beautiful a girl as Shayne had seen recently.

But a lap robe covered her from the waist down, and Shayne knew it was there for a reason. Maybe it was none of his business, but he wondered what affliction had put her into the wheelchair. At any rate, he was less than sure how to treat her, not having had too much contact with handicapped people.

As if she had been reading his mind, she said, "You don't have to worry, Mr. Shayne. You can't say anything to offend me. I've heard it all before, from the unintentionally cruel to the blatantly prejudiced."

She said it without bitterness or rancor, and the smile never left her face. Shayne said, "There's no point in me making an issue of it, then, is there? I'm glad to meet you, Stacy."

He put his hand out, and she took it, shaking it warmly. She said, "I'm glad you're the one who's helping my father."

Her voice dropped slightly, to a conspiratorial tone. "He's so wonderful, but there are some things he just can't handle by himself."

Tarrant appeared again in the hall, walking into the den and saying, "I see the two of you have met. This is my daughter Stacy, Mr. Shayne. She takes care of me, though to hear her tell it, it's the other way around."

Stacy smiled up at her father and then looked back at Shayne. "You don't know how much he's done for me, Mr. Shayne. He's the best father in the world."

Tarrant returned his daughter's smile and squeezed her shoulder. "I've got to talk to Mr. Shayne again, Stacy, so why don't you go in the kitchen and fix us all something to drink?"

"Sure. Is iced tea all right, Mr. Shayne?"

"Sounds good," Shayne said. He watched as she deftly rolled the wheelchair out of the den.

When she was gone, Tarrant said in a low voice, "That was what I wanted to show you, Mr. Shayne."

Shayne shot a sharp glance at him. "At least you didn't break out the violin and start playing hearts and flowers," he said bluntly.

Tarrant's face tightened. "What do you mean?"

"I suppose an operation will cure her, and you need the money for that."

"That's right," Tarrant nodded. "I know it seems like something out of a bad melodrama, Mr. Shayne, but that doesn't give you the right to make fun of us."

"Take it easy," Shayne said. A smile spread over his face slowly. "I just wanted to make sure you weren't trying to fake me out. I can see you had a good reason to take on Parrotti with your system. But why go back?"

The anger on Tarrant's face had eased. "The operation Stacy needs will cost approximately one hundred thousand dollars. I've got to get that other twenty-five thousand."

"Couldn't you borrow it somewhere?"

Tarrant shook his head. "There are two mortgages on this house already, and I don't own anything else of value. I've come this far with it, Mr. Shayne. I have to go on; I can't quit now."

"You're determined to go back to the *Silver Lagoon*?"

Tarrant nodded.

"You haven't asked me to go with you again, though."

"Stacy is my daughter, my responsibility. I love her very much."

"Yeah," Shayne rubbed his jaw, "I can see that. But I'll be by here tonight about eight o'clock. I want to watch this system of yours in action."

Tarrant smiled. "I really hoped you'd say that, but I didn't want to ask you."

"You don't have to. It's settled."

And then Stacy rolled in from the kitchen, balancing a tray with a pitcher and glasses. Shayne helped her with it, and the three of them exchanged small talk for a few minutes.

Hearts and flowers, Shayne was thinking wryly. Maybe he *was* crazy after all.

V

THE BEAUTIFUL BLONDE WAS AT THE DOOR of the Laguna Pier that night, and she recognized Shayne right away. She looked sternly at him and said, "You disappointed me last night. I thought you'd change your mind and come back."

Shayne shrugged. "I'd probably have had a better time if I had," he said, remembering what had happened after he left the club. "You'll have to give me another chance sometime."

She leaned closer to him. "I get off work at the same time tonight."

Shayne glanced over at Arthur Tarrant, who had come in with him. Ruefully, he said, "Anytime but tonight, I'm afraid. Things to do."

"I could make it worth your while to cancel."

"Sorry."

Shayne and Tarrant went on into the bar. Tarrant glanced back over his shoulder at the girl and said, "You seem to have made an impression on her."

Shayne nodded. "Maybe. Unless Parrotti instructed her to play up to me."

"You think that's possible?"

"Could be."

Shayne hadn't told Tarrant about the little scene that had taken place earlier at the professor's house, and he wasn't going to.

Stacy Tarrant had let him in when he arrived, saying that her father would be ready in a few minutes. She had rolled ahead of him into the den, then turned the chair to face him.

"Mr. Shayne — " she said, then broke off. "Do you mind if I call you Mike?"

"Not at all."

"I know that you're here tonight to help my father, and I wanted you to know that I'm grateful, Mike. He's been taking some terrible chances. I know that, even if he won't admit it to me. He needs someone like you, someone to sort of keep an eye on him."

Shayne didn't quite know what to say, so he stood there holding his hat and waiting for her to go on.

"The only reason my father is doing what he's doing is so that he can help me," she said."He hasn't been a happy man since my mother died several years ago. He's lost himself in his work to a large extent, but he's never forgotten about trying to help me, trying to find some way to get me out of this wheelchair."

"Why are you telling me this?" Shayne asked quietly.

"So you'll understand why I'm so thankful you're helping him." She moved closer to him, rolling the chair up beside him and reaching out to take one of his big hands in both of hers. "I want you to know that I'll do anything to repay you for your help, Mike. Anything."

She took his hand and put it against her soft cheek. Shayne stroked it, watching her close her eyes. Her breathing quickened, making her breasts rise and fall faster.

Keeping his voice flat, despite the emotions that were starting to rise within him, Shayne said, "What is this, Stacy? Are you making a pass at me?"

"Would it be so bad if I was? You're a very attractive man."

"I didn't say it would be bad — "

She looked up him quickly. "But I'm crippled, is that it? Well, I promise you, Mike, just because I can't walk doesn't mean that I can't do all the other things a woman can." Her tongue came out and licked over her lips. "Some of them I may even be better at."

Shayne looked down at her, unsure of his own feelings. There was no doubt that she was a lovely, vibrant girl, despite her handicap, but he had come here with absolutely no intention of getting involved with her romantically. Her attitude was a complete surprise to him.

Fortunately, he didn't have to make any choices. Tarrant's voice came from behind him. "Hello, Mr. Shayne. I see Stacy is keeping you entertained."

Shayne turned to face him. "You have a very lovely daughter." He hoped that Tarrant hadn't seen the look Stacy had flashed him.

Tarrant had shown no sign of seeing anything, though, and Shayne was convinced that he knew nothing about what his daughter had said and done. Now, as the two of them approached the bar in the Laguna Pier, he reaffirmed his decision not to even mention the incident.

The same bartender was on duty, and he looked surprised when he saw Shayne. He hurried over to them and asked, "What are you doing back here?"

The man probably hadn't known the outcome of the previous night's attack on Shayne. Knowing that Parrotti had sent men after the big redhead, it was no wonder he was surprised now, as Shayne sat down at the bar, big as life.

"We've come to take another little tour by launch," Shayne said. "Do you think they'll have room for us?"

The bartender looked a little afraid to even be talking to them. He said, "If I was you guys, I'd get out of here right now. You don't have any friends here. But don't tell anybody I told you that."

Shayne grinned. "We had our hearts set on a boat ride, didn't we, Professor."

"Yes, indeed," Tarrant said.

The bartender suddenly looked over Shayne's shoulder, his eyes widening. He scurried away down the bar without another word, as Shayne turned on his stool slowly.

The captain of the launch crew was standing there, a slight smile on his bearded face. "Hello, Mr. Shayne," he said quietly. "Mr. Parrotti was afraid you'd be foolish enough to come back."

"Did he give any orders about what to do if I did?"

The man shook his head. "Not to me. I guess you want to go back

out to the *Silver Lagoon*?"

"That's what we had in mind."

The captain looked over at Tarrant as if he had just noticed him and said, "Hello, Professor Tarrant. Planning on a big evening again?"

"I hope so," Tarrant said quietly.

"Well, let's go. The launch is ready. Good luck gentlemen." His smile became more wolfish. "You may need it."

THE RIDE ON THE LAUNCH OUT TO THE *SILVER LAGOON* was uneventful. Shayne glanced around at the other passengers and saw that they were of the same ilk as the night before.

When they disembarked from the launch and went up the ladder to the deck of the ship, they were met by a group of hard-faced stewards. The stewards ignored the rest of the potential players and came right to Shayne and Tarrant.

"Take it easy," one of them said. "Just a routine check for weapons. We don't allow them on the ship."

"You didn't search the others," Shayne said tightly.

The man grinned. "This is what you call a spot check."

Shayne felt like calling it something else, but he stood there calmly while they patted him down. He had to grin a little bit inwardly at the perplexed looks on their faces when they didn't find anything. He had known better than to try to bring a gun on board tonight, after the previous hostilities, and his shoulder harness was back in the Buick. If there was any trouble he would have to rely on his fists and his wits, but he hadn't wanted to give Parrotti any excuse to start trouble.

The stewards stepped back and let them go on into the gambling rooms. Tarrant headed straight for the blackjack table, with Shayne strolling along behind him.

Shayne's casual attitude was a front. He was trying his best to look in all directions at the same time.

Tarrant bought a stack of chips, placed them on the table in front of him, and then reached into his pocket. He pulled out a calculator with a multiplicity of buttons and turned it on.

Shayne snagged a drink from a passing waiter and lounged behind Tarrant as the professor got ready to play. The band in the next room was playing *"In the Mood,"* and the energic tune came plainly to Shayne's ears.

Tarrant slid several chips out in an opening bet, was dealt his cards along with the other players, and looked at them carefully. Shayne moved to the side enough to see that the dealer had fifteen showing. "Pay sixteen," he intoned.

Shayne couldn't see Tarrant's cards from his position, but when it came the professor's turn, he said, "Another card, please."

The dealer dropped another card in front of Tarrant. He picked it up, studied it for a moment, then punched out a series of numbers on the calculator, Tarrant looked up and said, "Again, please."

That made four cards. Shayne frowned. The odds said that Tarrant would bust on this card. But when the dealer gave him the pasteboard, Tarrant picked it up, glanced at it as if he already knew what it would be, and placed it with his others, face up. "Eighteen," he said.

Shayne shook his head slowly.

No one else around the table was able to beat Tarrant's eighteen. Shayne sipped his drink and watched as Tarrant collected his winnings, then watched as he did it again. And again.

THE TIME FLEW BY ALMOST WITHOUT SHAYNE NOTICING IT. The pile of chips in front of Tarrant continued to grow. He didn't win every hand, but his winning hands far outnumbered his losing ones. Occasionally he would stand with his cards and have another player pass him, and sometimes a blackjack by the dealer would negate his efforts with the calculator. But by the time an hour had passed, Shayne estimated that Tarrant had won almost twenty thousand dollars.

The dealer had begun to look worried almost as soon as Tarrant started playing. He was a thin, sallow-faced man with dark hair, and even though it was cool on the ship, Shayne saw a film of sweat on his forehead.

Tarrant was attracting attention from other quarters, too, more than Shayne would have liked. The other players were dropping out of the games to watch, and there seemed to be a congregation of stewards beginning to gather. Shayne didn't really begin to worry, though, until he glanced up and saw Anthony Parrotti standing on the other side of the table, face taut and angry.

Shayne moved up beside Tarrant and said in low tones, "You've got a lot of money there, Tarrant. Don't you think — "

Tarrant looked up from his calculator and said to the dealer, "Again."

The man dealt a card and reminded, "Pay twenty-one." He had two kings.

Tarrant took the card and turned it over, revealing an ace. He flipped his other two cards over. A jack and a ten . . . Shayne didn't know whether to curse or grin. Tarrant's system seemed to be working.

The new chips added to his pile made it total over twenty-five thousand. With what he had won before, it would more than pay for Stacy's operation. Shayne leaned toward Tarrant again.

"Don't you think that's enough?" he whispered. "We can't push

Parrotti too far. He already has a grudge against both of us."

Tarrant's face was slightly flushed, and his eyes burned with a light Shayne hadn't seen in them before. But he had seen it in other eyes. The gambling fever was on Tarrant. He looked up, ignoring Shayne, and his eyes fell on Parrotti across the table.

"You know who I am," he said to the gambling boss in a hoarse voice. "You know how much I won before. I want to bet all of it on one hand. I'm good for it, and you know it, Parrotti."

Shayne couldn't believe his ears. Evidently, neither could Parrotti. He opened his mouth, closed it, then opened it again to say, "You want to bet one hundred thousand dollars? What kind of odds do you want?"

Tarrant licked his lips. "Shall we say five to one? I think that's fair enough, considering what I'm risking on one hand of blackjack."

"You're risking more than you know," Parrotti said quietly. "All right, five to one. One hand." He snapped his fingers at the perspiring dealer. "A new deck. And let Mr. Tarrant examine it for as long as he wants."

The dealer broke out a new deck, passed it over to Tarrant, and watched as the professor shuffled through it. Tarrant handed it back and said, "All right. I'm ready."

Shayne clutched at his arm. "This is crazy, Tarrant," he growled. "Think of Stacy."

Tarrant shook Shayne's hand off and said, "That's who I *am* thinking about."

Shayne took a deep breath and released it slowly. The blackjack table was the main attraction now, and it seemed like everyone on the ship was crowded around it, watching this epic battle between Tarrant and the house.

The dealer gave Tarrant a card and turned up a nine for himself. Then another card to Tarrant, and a three for himself. Shayne edged closer to Tarrant as the professor picked up his cards and saw that he held a six and a seven. Tarrant went through his routine with the machine in his hand and then said quietly, "Again, please."

The dealer gave him an eight.

Shayne kept his face straight as Tarrant laid down his cards. But the dealer turned even paler. He had thirteen showing to Tarrant's twenty-one, and the only way the house could win was if he came up with twenty-one himself. A shocked murmur ran through the room. Tarrant had suddenly swung the odds in his favor when no one had thought he had a chance, Shayne included. Now there was half a million dollars on the line.

The dealer turned over a card in front of him.

Five.

The dealer swallowed. Four or above, and he was bust. His fingers were trembling as he turned over the next card. A two stared up at him.

The room was on the brink of pandemonium. Shayne could feel it. Tarrant stood completely still, his eyes riveted to the cards. Parrotti was the same way on the other side of the table. The dealer's fingers lifted another card from the top of the deck, and the room became absolutely quiet.

He dropped the card in front of him, face up.

A whoop went up from one of the spectators, and chaos broke loose. Wild cheering filled the air, and everyone was trying to slap Tarrant on the back.

Tarrant smiled weakly in the tumult. "The two of clubs," he said softly, and Shayne could barely hear him in the commotion. "I never thought a mere card could be so beautiful."

Shayne wasn't looking at the two of clubs lying on the table in front of the pasty-faced dealer, though. He was looking at Parrotti's face.

And what he saw there was murder.

VI

"I DON'T BELIEVE IT," TARRANT WAS SAYING forty-five minutes later. "I just don't believe it."

"I'm not sure I do either," Shayne growled. "I never expected Parrotti to let you get away with it."

They were in Shayne's Buick, crossing one of the causeways over Biscayne Bay. There was a certified check for $525,000 in Tarrant's pocket, and Shayne thought they were damn lucky they weren't both sinking somewhere in the depths of the Atlantic. Parrotti had looked mad enough to deep-six both of them without a moment's hesitation.

But hesitate he had. He had looked across the table at Tarrant and Shayne for a long moment after the dealer had dealt that last two, then had jerked his head brusquely, indicating that they were to follow him.

Shayne had been leery about following Parrotti into his office, but he didn't see any other course of action. They would be safe as long as they stayed in the main room, since even Parrotti wouldn't try anything in the presence of so many witnesses. On the other hand, Tarrant hadn't cashed in his chips yet, and the money was why they were there, after all.

"Be careful when we get in Parrotti's office," Shayne had advised Tarrant in low tones. "Follow my lead, and if anything starts to pop, head for the floor and stay there until I tell you to get up."

Nothing had happened, though, except that Parrotti wrote out the check and handed it to Tarrant with a cold stare. Then he turned his gaze toward Shayne and said, "Listen, shamus. If you want your client here to stay healthy, you keep him off my ship. I've let the two of you get away with a hell of a lot so far, but this is it. No more. You understand?"

"I understand," Shayne had said flatly. "Tarrant won't be back, I can promise you."

Tarrant had kept his mouth shut then, had, in fact, said nothing about Shayne's statement until now. But as they came down off the causeway into Miami, he said, "You know, I could still win quite a bit, if my calculations are correct. And I see no reason to doubt them."

"Maybe not," Shayne grunted, "but I see no reason to doubt your sanity if you go back there. You've pushed Parrotti to the wall. You've made him look bad, and those two boys he sent after me last night went into the bay because of you. He won't be willing to forgive or forget, but he might let it go, *as long as you don't push him any further.* No, Tarrant, if you want to go to the *Silver Lagoon* again, you'll go without me."

Tarrant kept quiet after that for several blocks, then said thoughtfully, "I suppose you're right, Mr. Shayne. There's no need to be greedy; I've already won five times as much as I needed. Now Stacy and I won't have to worry about money for a long time, maybe never."

There was that to consider, Shayne admitted to himself grudgingly. The windfall would be a real boon to Stacy. Medical bills could add up faster than almost anything else, he knew.

Worry was still intruding into his mind, though. He said, "Don't be too sure you're completely out of the woods yet. Parrotti may have been worried about causing a ruckus on board the ship. He might just wait until later to take action."

Tarrant glanced over at Shayne nervously. "You think so?"

"It's a possibility. You'll need to keep your eyes open for a while. Now might be the time to hire one of those larger agencies I told you about, one that can keep an eye on you around the clock."

Tarrant fell silent and seemed to be considering what Shayne had said. He was quiet until they reached his house, then he said, "Please come in, Mr. Shayne. I'd like it if you would have a cup of coffee with us, and I'm sure Stacy would, too."

What Shayne really wanted was a good stiff drink, after the tension

of the evening, but he didn't want to be rude to Tarrant. Besides, he wanted to be there when the professor told Stacy how things had gone.

Shayne parked his Buick in the driveway, and Tarrant led him through the garage to the back door. He unlocked it with a key, then stepped inside and called, "Stacy! Mr. Shayne and I are back."

Shayne was right behind Tarrant, and he almost bumped into him when the older man stopped suddenly. The big detective heard his sharp intake of breath. Tarrant gasped, "Oh, my God!"

Shouldering him aside, Shayne stepped into the room. It had been taken apart by experts, but Shayne could tell by looking at the damage that they hadn't been searching for something. Destruction was the only aim here.

They were in the kitchen-dining room. Drawers had been pulled from cabinets and their contents strewn about the floor. The table was overturned, its legs broken off, and the chairs that had stood around it had been turned into kindling. The bright curtains on the windows had been slashed into tatters.

Tarrant wasn't looking at the damage in the kitchen, though. He was staring through the door into the den, and his face had turned as pale as Shayne had ever seen a human being.

"Don't just stand there, professor," came a harsh voice from the den. "Come on in and join the fun."

TARRANT SNAPPED OUT OF HIS REVERIE and lunged toward the door, arms extended and his fingers hooked into claws. Shayne leaped after him, grabbing him and holding him back.

The voice came again, saying, "Let him go, shamus. You're invited, too."

Shayne swung Tarrant behind him bodily, the mathematics instructor no match for the brawny investigator. He stepped into the door and his gray eyes instantly took in the scene in the den.

Stacy's wheelchair was in the middle of the floor. She was cringing in it, terror twisting the features of her face. Her blouse was ripped open, exposing her full breasts in a lacy bra, and she was staring up in revulsion at the man who held her upper arm in a cruel grasp.

There was another man on the other side of her chair, and he was the one who had spoken. Now he went on, "You got here just in time for the real fun and games."

Both men were tall and burly, wearing work clothes, and they had nylon stockings covering their heads. Shayne didn't recognize them, but he knew the type, knew how dangerous they were.

He was still holding Tarrant back, but he could feel the professor

straining to get past him. Tarrant said, "You dirty — filthy — "

"You shouldn't talk that way, professor," the man said. "Not when we've got your little daughter here." His hand moved, and a knife flicked open as if by magic. The point of it hovered close to Stacy's throat. "Now if the two of you are good, we'll let you watch what we do to the little girl in the wheelchair."

Shayne felt white-hot rage burning inside him, but he fought it back. He wanted nothing more than to plow into these scum, but that would probably just get Stacy killed. That knife was too close to her throat. But his fingers were itching to form a fist and smash that leering grin he could see even through the stocking mask . . .

"Take it easy," he said, as much to himself as to the intruders. "I know what you boys are really here after, and so do you. And it's not the girl."

"She makes a nice bonus, though."

"Forget it. You'd better just get your job done, and fast, or Parrotti will have your hides."

The two men exchanged glances, as if wondering how Shayne knew about Parrotti. Shayne went on quickly, "You are after the half-million aren't you? I knew Parrotti wasn't going to let us off the hook that easy."

"I don't know what the hell you're talking about," the spokesman said unconvincingly. "But if you've got half a million, you damn well better hand it over."

"Sure." Shayne still had a hand on Tarrant's arm. Now he turned to the professor, and his hand darted under Tarrant's coat and into the pocket where he had seen him place the check. Tarrant started to protest, but Shayne cut him off.

He turned toward the man with the knife, holding out the folded check. "Here it is," he said. "Five hundred thousand. Now how about clearing out?"

The man's eyes lit up as he reached for the check with his free hand. The knife wavered, moved away from Stacy's neck, and Shayne grabbed the chance.

He dove forward as the man reached for the check, ramming into him and knocking him away from Stacy. The girl in the wheelchair let out a scream as the other man jerked her to the side and went after Shayne.

Shayne hooked a vicious left to the stomach of the man with the knife, then grabbed his wrist and snapped it down on his knee, sending the knife spinning away. Then he pivoted to meet the charge of the second man.

He turned just in time to catch a big bony fist in the jaw. The blow sent him stumbling backwards, and before he knew what was happening, he had tripped over Stacy's wheelchair and went sprawling to the floor.

The second man aimed a kick at him, but Shayne grabbed the big foot and twisted sharply, while at the same time hooking a leg around the other foot. The man went flying with a yell.

Shayne heard a roar of anger and rolled to the side as the first man leaped back into the fight. He had regained the knife while Shayne had his hands full with the second man, and now the blade slashed through the air where Shayne's throat had been only seconds before.

Stacy was screaming, and Shayne wondered what had happened to Tarrant. He found out a moment later, as he saw a blur behind the man with the knife. There was a desk in one corner of the den with a heavy glass paperweight on it, and Shayne saw the thing in Tarrant's hands now as he brought it crashing down on the man's head. The paperweight didn't shatter, but the man with the knife folded up limply, the weapon slipping from his fingers to the floor.

Shayne grabbed for it before the other man could get it, but he didn't have to worry. As the man jumped toward the knife, Stacy choked off her screams and rolled directly into his path. He stumbled, and by that time Shayne had surged to his feet and grabbed the knife.

The man avoided Shayne's first lunge, and then somehow Stacy had gotten between them, keeping Shayne from attacking again. He stooped, jerked his groggy companion to his feet, and yelled, "Come on! We gotta get out of here!"

Shayne dodged around Stacy and started after them as they ran back through the kitchen. Tarrant headed after them at the same time, and suddenly he ran into Shayne, slowing them both down. Shayne bit off, "Dammit, this is my job, not yours, Tarrant! Get back there and see to your daughter!"

Shayne pounded on out through the kitchen and garage as Tarrant dropped back to check on Stacy. He didn't see the two men as he emerged into the driveway, but as he stood there looking around, he heard a car start down the street. It tore away from the curb without lights, and Shayne ran into the street as it barreled down on him. He grabbed for his gun, intending to pump several shots through the windshield, and remembered too late that he had never donned the harness again after taking it off earlier. The roaring car loomed up in front of him in the darkness, and all he could do was jump.

He felt the violence of its passage beside him as he went spinning to the street. He rolled over and came to his feet as the fleeing car turned

a corner up the street and disappeared. He knew that they had too big a lead on him now. Catching up to them would be next to impossible.

And he had Tarrant and Stacy to worry about. Shayne hurried back into the house to find Tarrant leaning over Stacy. He had wrapped his jacket around her, and he had an arm over her shoulders. Her face was against his chest, and sobs racked her body.

"They didn't hurt her," Tarrant said, looking up at Shayne. "She's just badly frightened. They hadn't been here long when we arrived."

"I figured as much," Shayne said tightly. "Parrotti probably sent them as soon as we left the ship. They'd have to fly to beat us here by much."

"It's over now, anyway," Tarrant said wearily.

"I wouldn't bet on it."

"I would," Tarrant said ironically. "You see, Mr. Shayne, I'm going to call the police and tell them all about it. If they want to give me any trouble about illegal gambling, or if the University finds out, I don't care. I won't place Stacy's life in danger anymore."

Shayne nodded. "That's probably a smart thing to do. Once the cops know the story, if anything happens to you, they'd be after Parrotti hot and heavy. It figures he'll cut his losses and leave you be. You'd better be careful for a long time, though. Guys like Parrotti are hard to figure sometimes."

"Oh, we'll be careful, you can count on that."

Shayne heaved a sigh and rubbed a thumbnail along his jaw. This case might be winding up, but he still felt uneasy. It had been a messy one, what with two attacks on him in twenty-four hours, and something about it still didn't feel right. He was going to follow his own advice and be careful for a while.

Men like Parrotti hardly ever forgive.

And they never forget.

VII

"MR. TARRANT IS GOING TO HIRE ONE OF THE BIG AGENCIES for bodyguard duty, isn't he?" Lucy Hamilton asked the next morning after Shayne had filled her in one what had happened the night before.

"He will if he's got any sense," Shayne grunted. "He said he was going to, but I left before he called the police or called one of the other agencies. He's smart enough to know that's his best chance. Stacy was pretty shook up, and he wanted to get her to bed first."

"I don't blame him. That poor girl." A tiny shudder ran through Lucy. In the course of her long association with Shayne, she had faced

danger many times, so she knew how frightened Stacy must have been. "From what you said, she was pretty cool in the clutch, though."

"She helped turn the odds in our favor, that's for sure. Of course, she also got in my way a time or two, but what can you expect? She's not an experienced fighter."

"So our part of the case is over?" Lucy asked.

"It looks like it." Shayne reached inside his jacket and took out a folded piece of paper. "Here's Tarrant's check. You can deposit it later."

Lucy unfolded it and glanced at the amount. "He was generous," she said.

"He can afford to be, now. All told, he took nearly six hundred grand off Parrotti."

"You think a man like Parrotti will let him get away with something like that?"

Shayne shrugged. "He sent his goons after me night before last and then pulled that stunt last night. Both times he wound up looking bad. He's not too likely to let that pass, but on the other hand, he's drawing attention to himself every time he tries something. His bosses can't like that. It's just a question of whether they like the big loss less."

Shayne stood up where he had been perched on the corner of Lucy's desk and opened the door into his office. Lucy said, "So what are you going to do now?"

"Keep my own eyes open, in case Parrotti decides he's got to even the score. And I'll check in with Tarrant now and then, just to make sure they're all right."

"Sounds like a good idea."

Shayne went on into his office and settled down in the comfortable chair behind his battered old desk. He lit a cigarette, swiveled his chair around, and looked out the window at downtown Miami. He wasn't really seeing the bustling streets below, though. He was seeing the luxurious gambling ship, floating on the blue water several miles out.

Something was bothering him, some indefinable instinct that told him he couldn't relax and forget about this case yet. His nose had been trained by years in the detective business, and it told him there was still trouble in the air.

THE MORNING PASSED SLOWLY. Lucy came into his office with a handful of checks that needed signing to cover the monthly bills, and he talked to several potential clients over the phone. Most of them had jobs he preferred not to take, and a few he was able to help out with some simple advice over the wire. There was nothing of sufficient

interest to take his mind off Tarrant and the run-ins with Anthony Parrotti.

Shayne knew this restless feeling well. He had had it on other cases, cases that had appeared to be over. Usually, instead of being over, they were just about ready to break wide open.

There was no point in sitting around the office feeling antsy, though. A little before noon, Shayne went out into Lucy's office, snagged his hat off the rack, and said, "I think I'll go over to the cophouse and see if Will wants to have lunch with me. I'd like to tell him personally about this Tarrant thing. See you later, Angel."

He settled the hat on his coarse red hair and stalked out of the office, trying to keep a scowl off his face. His still-sore shoulder was hurting a little bit from the rough and tumble the night before, but he didn't think that was the cause of his moodiness.

It didn't take long to drive over to Miami police headquarters. Shayne found a parking place on the street and was striding back toward the entrance to the building when the door was suddenly thrust open and several men came hurrying out.

Shayne recognized the burly figure of Police Chief Will Gentry among them, and from the way that Gentry's thick legs were carrying him along in a hurry, Shayne knew that something was up.

Shayne increased his own pace, caught up to the men, and said, "Hello, Will. Something big breaking?"

Gentry glanced over at Shayne and didn't seem surprised to see him. He grunted a greeting, then said, "I should have known you'd turn up here, Mike. You must have a nose for corpses."

Shayne raised a bushy red eyebrow. "I didn't know anything about it." He recognized the other men with Gentry as detectives from the Homicide Bureau and technicians from the police lab. It was a good bet there was a body somewhere.

"We've got a stiff in the bay," Gentry told him. "Want to come along, or did you come down here for something else?"

"No, I was just killing time."

"Somebody's been killing something else," Gentry said dryly.

Shayne got into the back seat of a police sedan with Gentry. As one of the two Homicide men in the front started the car, Shayne asked, "Why are you going out on this, Will? Since when does a body washing up merit the police chief hurrying to the scene?"

"When it washes up on the private beach of one of the city council members," Gentry growled. "Bates was on the phone to me right away, howling up a storm. Seems his two kids were going down to swim this morning, and they came back to the house yelling about a

dead man on the beach. I can't blame Bates much for being shook up."

A patrol car with lights flashing and siren screaming led the procession to the home of Councilman Bates. Besides the sedan carrying Shayne and Gentry, there were two other cars full of cops. It seemed like a lot for one corpse, but Shayne knew the pressure would be on Gentry to crack this case, because of the circumstances of the body's discovery.

Bates' home was in far north Miami, in an exclusive residential district right on the shore of Biscayne Bay. The police cars turned off the boulevard into a circular drive that led up to the large house. There was a general slamming of doors as they all got out at the front door. Gentry strode toward it, but before he could get there, it opened and a man came hurrying out, face distraught.

"Thank God you're here, Chief," the man exclaimed. "I've never been so shocked in my life. I mean, he was just lying there, with his head all — "

"Take it easy, Mr. Bates," Gentry said, sticking an unlit cigar in his mouth. "Why don't you just show us the body?"

Bates led them around the side of the house and through a green backyard toward a narrow strip of sandy beach. Shayne trooped along with them, his hands jammed in his pockets. He saw two uniformed officers standing on the beach, and between them was a lumpy, canvas-covered shape.

The officers nodded to Gentry, and the older of them said, "Officers Logan and Mitchell, sir. We caught the original call."

Gentry pointed at the shape under the canvas. "That him?"

"Yes, sir. We didn't do anything but cover him up." The officer gestured at the houses lining the beach. "Since he was out here in plain sight and all."

"That's fine, Logan. Well, let's take a look, shall we?"

Shayne noticed that Bates turned his face away, paling at the thought of what was under the canvas. The officers lifted the covering gingerly.

The man underneath it was lying on his face, his wet hair plastered to what was left of the back of his head. He wore black slacks and a white shirt, and if he had been wearing shoes when he went in the water, they had come off; his feet were clad only in socks. Gentry stooped beside him and felt quickly for a wallet.

"Nothing," he said a moment later. "They didn't want him identified too easily."

One of the other detectives was kneeling beside the corpse's feet.

"Look at this, Chief," he said, indicating an area of bare skin on the man's calf where the sock had slid down and the leg of his slack was pulled up. "He's had a wire on him, probably with a weight on the other end of it. Whoever put him in the water didn't ever want him found. Somebody slipped up and didn't get the wire tight enough, though. It came off."

"Any idea where he came from?" Gentry asked the group. There was a general shaking of heads, and one of the technicians said, "He could have been dumped in the bay itself, or he could have washed in from offshore someplace. Hard to tell until an autopsy lets us know what's in the lungs."

"Maybe nothing," Gentry said. "I think it's a good bet he was dead when he went in. Look at that exit wound."

Shayne had kept quiet so far, content to merely observe. After all, this wasn't his case; he was here merly as an uninvolved observer. But something was bothering him, and as he stared down at the body, he suddenly said, "Look at his fingers, Will. Somebody worked on them with a knife. They didn't want any prints left, either, in case the body did surface. I don't think you'll need them for an identification, though."

Gentry glanced up sharply at Shayne. "What are you talking about, Mike?"

"Turn him over."

Gentry stood up, nodded to two of the officers, and they rolled the corpse over onto its back. Shayne stared down at the dead face grimly. He felt his insides tighten up, and he knew that his restless mood of the morning had been justified. The affair of Arthur Tarrant and his unbeatable system wasn't completely over yet.

"Do you know him, Mike?" Will Gentry asked.

"Yeah, I do," Shayne said. He reached up without thinking about it and began to tug gently on his left earlobe. "I don't know his name, but I know where he worked until last night. He dealt blackjack on Tony Parrott's gambling ship, the *Silver Lagoon*."

VIII

GENTRY TOOK SHAYNE ASIDE, and while they stood under a palm tree in Bates' backyard and Shayne smoked a cigarette, he told Gentry what had been happening in the last forty-eight hours. Gentry snorted and said, "It sounds like your client's not the smartest man in the world, Mike, even if he had developed a winning system. Parrotti's the wrong man to use it on."

"I agree. What have you got on Parrotti?"

"Nothing that would get him in trouble here. He's always kept his nose clean on the mainland, ever since he got here late last year, and that boat of his is out of everybody's jurisdiction. I know the Coast Guard would love it if he accidentally got too close to shore, but I don't look for it to happen. His people are too sharp to allow it."

Shayne stared out at the placid surface of Biscayne Bay and said, "I've got a feeling this is all tied together, Will. You saw the wound on that fellow. One shot between the eyes, an execution as sure as anything. Parrotti didn't intend for him to ever be found, and it's pure blind luck that he drifted in here before a shark got him. If Parrotti ever finds out about it, I wouldn't want to be the guy responsible for dumping the dealer and seeing that he stayed dumped."

"You think Parrotti had him killed?"

"I think it's highly likely, yeah. Who else would have done it?"

Gentry frowned. "Why, though? Why would Parrotti kill the guy? Just because he happened to be the dealer when Tarrant made his score?"

"Kings used to kill messengers who brought bad news," Shayne commented dryly. "Maybe this poor bastard was just in the wrong place at the wrong time."

"Maybe so," Gentry grunted. "I know this much. We'll have some questions to put to Mr. Anthony Parrotti the next time he sets foot on shore."

Shayne watched the hustle and bustle around the body without saying anything more. The police photographers were taking their pictures, while closer to the house, detectives questioned the two children who had found the body. Councilman Bates and his wife were standing beside their children, and Shayne thought that the kids looked calmer than their parents.

A theory was starting to take shape in Shayne's head, a theory he hadn't mentioned to Will Gentry. He hadn't held back any of the evidence he had but he wasn't ready to let the chief in on what was going on in his brain. Not yet, anyway. He wanted proof before he laid any accusations at anybody's feet.

But Shayne was absolutely covinced that there was a connection between the dealer's death and the money Tarrant had won the night before. He didn't think that Parrotti had had the man killed because he had happened to be dealing when Tarrant won, despite his comments to Gentry. There had to be something more to it than that.

Parrotti was a man who used violence; Shayne knew that from first-hand experience. But he wouldn't employ it unless he had a good

reason, some purpose to be served. Shayne didn't think he would have killed the dealer just to vent his anger over Tarrant's winning.

Shayne lit another cigarette, and his cool gray eyes narrowed as he thought. Then why would Parrotti have the dealer killed? That was the question that had to be answered.

And Shayne thought he had the answer, even though he didn't like it much.

He called Gentry over and said, "I'm going to take off, Will. Can one of your boys give me a lift?"

"Yeah, we don't need all these guys hanging around here. I've pretty well got Bates calmed down. Do you have any more ideas on this killing, Mike?"

"Not for sure. I think I'll do a little poking around in it, though, if it's all right with you?"

Gentry looked at Shayne sharply, then said, "That Irish curiosity of yours is acting up, isn't it? You go right ahead and poke around. Hell, you'd do it whether I said it was all right or not, wouldn't you?"

Shayne grinned. "Probably. I'll let you know if I come up with anything. And Will . . . when you get a positive ID on him, would you let me know? If I'm not in the office, Lucy will be."

"Sure." Gentry waved one of the other officers over. "Take Mr. Shayne back to headquarters with you, Eddie, so he can pick up his car."

Shayne said his goodbyes to Gentry and the other cops, then rode back to police headquarters in a patrol car with the officer called Eddie. When he was back in his own Buick again, he pointed it back toward the office on Flagler Street.

LUCY LOOKED UP FROM HER TYPEWRITER as he came into the office and said, "Why, Michael, you look positively cheerful. You must have a murder to solve?"

Shayne stopped short. "How did you know?" he asked.

Lucy's eyes widened and she gasped, "You mean that there really has been a murder?"

"An execution is more like it. I'm pretty sure I know who was behind it, though. Now I'm working on why. It was a dealer from the *Silver Lagoon* who got killed, the one who was handing out the cards last night when Tarrant made his big score."

"You think Parrotti had him killed?"

"I'm pretty sure of it."

"But why, Michael? Just because he happened to be dealing then?"

Gentry had asked the same question, but Shayne gave Lucy a little

different answer. "I'm not sure he just *happened* to be dealing."

He tossed his hat onto the rack and headed for the door into his office. Lucy was looking puzzled by his cryptic answer, but she didn't ask any more questions. She knew how he was when he was working on a theory in his head, going over all facets of a case and trying to make them all fit together.

There was a bottle of Martell in the metal filing cabinet in Shayne's office, along with a couple of glasses. He took the bottle and a glass now, set them on the desk with his cigarettes beside them, and sat down to think. Smoke drifted and curled up to the ceiling, and the level in the bottle went down a couple of inches in the next half-hour. Then Shayne reached out and pulled the phone over to him.

It took another half-hour and several phone calls to his contacts among Miami's gambling community, but he got a name to go with his description of the murdered dealer — Carl Gilliam. And in addition to the name, he got some information on the man himself.

"A goddamn wizard with the cards," one of Shayne's contacts said. "He could have been a blasted magician if he had wanted, but he was really too good even for that. You could tell him exactly what hand you wanted in poker, for example, and he'd give it to you. And it takes a damn sharp eye to spot what he's doing, sharper than most people got. When he's in practice, though, he can even beat that. He can give you the hand you call, and he can give everybody else the hands you call, too."

"What about at blackjack? Was he any good?"

"Damn straight. Carl Gilliam never busts unless he wants to."

Shayne didn't tell the man that Gilliam had gone bust for the last time. He just thanked him and moved on to the next informant who owed him some favors.

The picture that took shape was unmistakable, confirmed by all of Shayne's contacts who had known Gilliam. They all said that he was a virtuoso with the pasteboards. Some of them had known that he was working for Parrotti. Shayne wasn't surprised when they relayed the information that Gilliam hadn't intended on keeping his present job for long.

There was a bit of a bad taste in his mouth when he finished his calls and sat back to sip another glass of Martell. The smoothness of the cognac helped some. The phone rang as he sat there, and Lucy got it in the outer office. A moment later, she said through the intercom, "Will Gentry on the phone, Michael."

He punched the button on his end and said, "Thanks, Angel," then picked up the phone. "Yeah, Will?"

"We've got the ID on that dealer now, Mike, if you still want it."

"Carl Gilliam, I know. I did some calling around."

There was a moment of silence on the other end, then Gentry said wearily, "I should have known you'd beat us to it. Listen, Mike, I know you've got something going on in your head, I can tell. Why don't you spill it?"

Shayne rubbed a thumbnail along his jaw, feeling it rasp against the red stubble. He considered for a long moment, then said, "All right, Will. Let me get Lucy in on this, so I'll only have to say it once."

He buzzed Lucy on the intercom and told her to pick up the phone on her end. When she had, he went on, "Here's what I've found out, Will. Gilliam was a good dealer, a damn good one. He could manipulate the cards so that no matter what system a player was using, he wouldn't win unless Gilliam wanted him to. I'm not saying he cheated on every game he dealt on the *Silver Lagoon*. I'm just saying that Tarrant could never have won that half-million without Gilliam's cooperation."

"You think Gilliam threw the game to Tarrant?" Gentry asked.

"That's right. I think they were in it together, and that Tarrant's so-called system was just so much malarkey. I'm no mathematician, but I never could make any sense out of those numbers Tarrant kept punching into his calculator. I'm convinced it was just a blind."

"A double-cross like that would give Parrotti plenty of motive to knock off Gilliam. He wasn't very smart, trying to rip off Parrotti that way."

"A man will take a lot of chances for a share of half a million," Shayne said. "The bet didn't pay off this time for Gilliam, though."

Lucy joined the conversation by asking, "If it was all set up, Michael, then why did Tarrant hire you?"

"Because he was scared of Parrotti, just like he said. That much of the story was true, even if the system was a phony. He knew that Parrotti wouldn't take a loss lightly, no matter what the cause of it."

"Poor Mr. Tarrant," Lucy said. "He had to take such risks just to help his daughter."

"Poor Mr. Tarrant helped to get a man killed," Shayne said, "even if the scheme did start out in a good cause. He and Gilliam didn't have to get greedy and try to run their take up so high."

"I think your theory's right, Mike," Gentry put in. "But it was still Parrotti who killed Gilliam, more than likely. Our problem is still the same. We can't touch him as long as he stays out there on the ship."

Shayne downed the rest of his drink as Lucy asked Gentry, "What about Mr. Tarrant, Will? What will happen to him?"

"Not a damn thing, so far as we're concerned. He may have plotted with Gilliam to fleece Parrotti, but he hasn'tbroken any laws other than engaging in illegal gambling, and you know it's next to impossible to make that stick. As long as he can stay out of Parrotti's way, it looks like he's gotten away with it. And gotten away with the whole bundle of loot, too. Personally, I can't get too worked up over somebody sticking it to the mob that way."

Shayne was staring out the window, a frown on his face, as Gentry went on, "Something else I meant to tell you, Mike. I checked, and Tarrant never called us last night like he told you he was going to. You think maybe he's planning on leaving town?"

"I don't know," Shayne said, standing up and butting out his cigarette in the ashtray. "But I think I'll pay a visit to our math professor. There are still a few problems I'd like the answers to."

IX

SHAYNE WAS TRYING HARD NOT TO BE TOO ANGRY with Arthur Tarrant as he drove out toward the professor's house. But he couldn't help feeling some resentment over the way he had been used. Like Will Gentry, he wasn't too upset that Tarrant had succeeded in fleecing Parrotti and his mob bosses, but he didn't like being part of the scheme unknowingly. If he had known what the professor was up to, he might have had second thoughts about taking the case, even after the ambush attempt in the hall outside his office.

The main thing he wanted to know from Tarrant was the why of it. He knew about Stacy's handicap, all right, and the expensive operation she needed, but Shayne wanted to know who had come up with the idea of staging the gambling wins. He couldn't quite visualize Tarrant coming up with such a scheme. It had probably been Carl Gilliam's idea, but how he had hooked up with Tarrant was something that Shayne couldn't figure.

After the conversation with Will Gentry, Shayne had called Tarrant's house and not gotten an answer. He had tried the University then, but Tarrant was not in his office, and the math department secretary had no idea where he was. He wasn't scheduled for a class at this time, so he could have been almost anywhere, either on the campus or off it somewhere.

Shayne had thought about this and tugged on his earlobe. Stacy should have been home, even if Tarrant wasn't, and Shayne wondered why she hadn't answered the phone. The more he thought about it, the more he began to worry. It could be that Parrotti had tried some-

thing again and that Stacy was in trouble. That had been all it took to get him to act on his impulse. He was going to check on Stacy and then track Tarrant down and ask him why the hell he had gotten into such a dangerous game when he should have known he would be putting Stacy in danger, too.

Lucy, seeing the look on his face when he left the office, had warned him to keep a tight rein on his temper. Shayne was trying, but he could feel the anger building in proportion to the worry about Stacy's safety.

He was only a couple of blocks from Tarrant's house now, and as he turned the Buick onto their street, he saw movement down the block. There was a car in Tarrant's driveway, and a couple of people were moving around it. At least someone was home now.

Shayne's eyes suddenly slitted, and his foot went to the brake. He pulled the Buick in at the curb, still several houses away from Tarrant's, as he watched the activity in Tarrant's driveway. The people going back and forth from the car to the house didn't seem to have noticed him, and that gave him a chance to study them.

They were loading things in the car, suitcases and clothes bags and other small items, as if they were going on a long trip. Shayne frowned, his jaw set and his face getting grimmer and grimmer. He reached inside his jacket and made sure his pistol was sliding easily in his shoulder holster. He just might need it when he confronted them.

Part of his theory had gone right out the window. He was still convinced that the games had been a set-up between Tarrant and Gilliam and that the so-called system was a fake. But now he knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that he had been lied to more than once, and that there was more behind this scheme than he had thought.

He thought it through quickly. His mind, keen to start with despite his rough-and-tumble exterior, had been trained by years of detective work. It ran through the possibilities, considering and discarding rapidly, until he was left with only one answer that made sense to him.

Shayne waited until the two people were at the car again, then put the still-idling Buick back in gear and pulled away from the curb. He accelerated quickly and pulled up in front of Tarrant's house with a screech of tires. The people at the car spun around and regarded him with shock.

Shayne was out of his car in a split-second. He walked around the front of it as they stared at him, then leaned a hip on the fender casually. He said, "Hello, professor. You and Stacy taking a little family trip?"

Arthur Tarrant stared at him, speechless, while Stacy stood beside him defiantly. She was wearing a skirt now, instead of a concealing lap

robe, and Shayne could see what he had suspected as soon as he saw her walking out to the car.

There wasn't a damn thing wrong with her legs.

She glared at the big redheaded detective and snapped, "Why the hell did you have to come here?"

"I was worried about you," Shayne said slowly. "I can see now that I had no reason to be. You seem to be perfectly healthy."

Tarrant came out of his shocked reverie by blurting, "It wasn't my idea! I wasn't the one — "

"Shut up!" Stacy's voice cracked like a whip. "What can he do about it?"

Shayne straightened up and took a step toward them, his face cold and hard now. "I can get to the bottom of this," he said. "That's just what I'm going to do, whether the two of you like it or not."

Tarrant was pale. He said hurriedly, "I'm telling you, it wasn't me — "

"You'll answer my questions, though, won't you?" Shayne asked, coming closer to him.

Tarrant's nerve suddenly broke. He had done a masterful acting job all along, but he couldn't hope to maintain it in the face of Shayne's anger. Shayne didn't expect him to react like he did, though.

Tarrant leaped at him suddenly, swinging a blow at his head. Shayne was caught by surprise, and while his instincts jerked his head to the side so that he didn't get the full force of the blow, it was still enough to knock his hat off and make him take a step backwards.

Tarrant whirled around and darted toward the house, running through the open garage door. Shayne plunged after him, past Stacy. He could have pulled his gun and probably dropped Tarrant, but he didn't want to do that until he had the full story of his weird plot. He had about decided that Tarrant wasn't the brains behind it.

But he should have been paying more attention to his back. Stacy was behind him, and he realized that too late. He saw Tarrant duck through a door in the other room of the garage, out into the small backyard, and then he heard the quick footsteps behind him. He threw on the brakes and started to turn around.

He was halfway there when something slammed into his shoulder. Pain and fire shot through him. That was where he had been shot a few weeks before, and it was still tender. He gasped and staggered backwards, trying to fight the pain down.

Stacy stood in front of him, a tire iron clutched in her hand and her face twisted in an ugly mask. She leaped at him and swung the tire iron again, this time at his head.

Shayne slipped to one side and stepped inside her swing. His good arm went around her and jerked her to him, squeezing tightly. She cursed, and he could feel her warm breath in his face.

She squirmed like an eel and kept trying to smash the tire iron against his head, but he was too close to her now. Feeling was starting to come back into his shoulder and arm, and he used the hand to grab for the tire iron, planning to wrest it from her grip.

She yelled, "Help me, you fool!" and Shayne realized that he had forgotten about Tarrant while he was wrestling with Stacy. He got his hand on the tire iron, plucked it from her fingers, and shoved her away roughly. She lost her balance and went down with a wail, and he saw just in what good shape her legs really were as her skirt flew up.

He heard movement behind him again and ducked as something whistled through the air. Tarrant had come back into the garage while he was fighting with Stacy, and he had a shovel in his hands, swinging it viciously. Shayne felt rage build up and burst inside him. He had been played for a fool by these two, and now they were trying to pulp his brains with blunt instruments. It was enough to make even a big redheaded Irish shamus mad.

And enough to make him careless. He lunged at Tarrant, and he never noticed the small patch of oil on the concrete floor of the garage, dropped there over the years by the car. His foot suddenly went out from under him when he stepped on it, and he felt himself falling.

Tarrant was quick to take advantage of the opportunity. He slashed at Shayne with the shovel. Shayne threw an arm up to ward off the blow. He heard a crack as the shovel hit him, but he didn't know if it was the shovel handle breaking, or his arm.

He didn't have time to worry about it, though, or even to feel the pain in his arm for very long. Tarrant swung the shovel again, and Shayne felt an explosion in his head. The pain lasted only for a second, and then it was washed away by a sea of deep black ink that carried Shayne along with it into the depths.

X

AT FIRST HE THOUGHT HE WAS STILL IN THAT SEA OF INK. The slight rolling motion of the surface beneath him tended to confirm that. Then, as consciousness came creeping closer, Shayne realized that he was on a boat. It didn't take him long to guess just what boat it was.

When he managed to pry his eyes open, what he saw told him that his guess had been right. He was looking at a ceiling, which meant he

was sprawled on a floor. The carpet he was lying on was thick and soft, and the dark paneling on the walls looked expensive. Shayne thought he recognized the place, and when he looked to his left and saw the massive desk, he knew exactly where he was — in the office of Anthony Parrotti on the *Silver Lagoon.*

"Welcome back to the land of the living, Shayne," a mocking voice said. "We thought for a while that Tarrant had hit you too hard."

There was no point in pretending to still be unconscious; they had seen his movements. Shayne gathered his strength and sat up, then regretted it when it felt like his head was going to fall off. The spinning pain subsided in a few seconds, but it made him grit his teeth while it was going on. There was little feeling in his left arm except a dull ache.

Shayne looked around, his lean face taut. Parrotti was seated behind his desk, looking smug and satisfied in his white suit. Tarrant, who was almost as pale as Parrotti's clothes, was seated in a chair against the wall, while Stacy was lounging on a plush sofa. She had changed from the clothes she had worn earlier into a clinging, silk pajama-like outfit.

Parrotti smiled at Shayne and went on, "Of course, if the good professor *had* hit you too hard, it would have saved us a little trouble later on. I don't think you'll be too much of a problem, though."

Shayne's throat was tight and his words came out a little hoarse, but he said, "It's into the ocean with me, right, Tony?"

"That's right, shamus. You catch on fast."

"Not fast enough. You'd better hope that whoever takes care of it does a better job than the one on Gilliam, though."

Parrotti's face twisted momentarily in anger. "That was nothing but a goddamn fluke! One of my boys didn't get the weights on his feet good enough, so I let the other guys practice on him. Still, the sharks should have gotten Gilliam. It would have been a lot better for you if they had."

"And a lot better for you, too."

Parrotti shrugged. "I'm going to come out of it all right."

"Once I'm gone, nobody will suspect, is that it?" Shayne swung his gaze over to Stacy. "Before I go, I'd at least like an introduction to the young lady."

She smiled at him, and he saw the cruelty that curved her lips. "My name really is Stacy," she said, "only it's Stacy Collins, not Tarrant."

"I guess Parrotti recruited you to be part of this scheme."

"Damn right. It sure beat what I was doing."

"And you were part of the cover story, as well as maybe part of Tarrant's payoff. The two of you were getting ready to disappear together when I showed up, weren't you?"

Tarrant had been silent up to now, obviously shaken up by everything that had happened. But his head came up and he answered Shayne, "Everything would have been all right if you hadn't gotten nosy. You think you've got it all figured out, don't you? His voice was rising in anger. "It just so happens that Stacy and I are in love! Isn't that right, Stacy dear?"

Before Stacy could say anything, Shayne asked, "And you believed that, Tarrant?" He grunted. "They just told you that to get you to go along with their plan."

"All right, all right." Parrotti sounded bored. "There's no point in squabbling at this late date. We've got the loot, and Stacy will be going with you to South America just like we all agreed, Tarrant. Don't get in an uproar."

Shayne had been sitting on the carpet, but now he stood up shakily. Parrotti put his hand in a desk drawer and watched him warily.

"I want to be sure I've got all of this straight," he said. "You don't mind, do you, Parrotti, under the circumstances?"

Parrotti waved the hand that wasn't in the drawer. "Be my guest."

"You came up with the idea of fleecing your bosses of some of the money they were putting into the *Silver Lagoon*. So you found Tarrant, a math professor with a supposedly foolproof system. You arranged with Gilliam to let Tarrant win, and then Tarrant would turn the money back over to you. Only it went into your pockets now, rather than the coffers of the *Silver Lagoon*. Tarrant was supplied with a phony handicapped daughter and a reason to be going after that much money with this 'system' of his. I was hired so that everything would look like it was on the up-and-up if your superiors investigated this business. You could tell them that Tarrant had to be on the level with his system; he even hired Mike Shayne to be his bodyguard. That way, your behind was covered, right, Parrotti?"

"More or less," Parrotti nodded. "You can figure things out, Shayne. But what good is it going to do you now?"

"None, I guess. I just like to know where things stand." Shayne suddenly let himself sway and stagger slightly. Parrotti stiffened, but Shayne caught his balance and came no closer to the desk.

Parrotti laughed. "You're in a hell of a shape, Shayne. You're not going to be any trouble at all."

Shayne hoped like hell that Parrotti would go on thinking that.

He might have a chance if they let their guard down. If he could make them think he was in worse shape than he actually was . . . At any rate, he wouldn't have to pretend too much. He felt like he had been through a meat grinder.

He said, "So everybody gets a cut of the — what was it? — nearly $600,000? Tarrant and Stacy disappear, and you can even hint around that you took care of them. You stay off the hook with the Mob, and they live it up in Brazil."

"Yeah, Shayne, you're a smart man. Too smart for your own good."

Shayne swung toward Tarrant and again staggered a little bit. "You jumped at the chance, didn't you?" he accused. "You were tired of the academic life, lonely, without many friends. You were perfect for Parrotti's purpose. He offered you a bundle of money and the companionship of a beautiful young girl, and you didn't give a damn that it was mob money and that the girl was only following orders."

"It wasn't like that!" Tarrant exclaimed. "I told you, Stacy and I — "

"Are a couple of crooks like Parrotti," Shayne cut in. His tone was almost pitying as he went on, "You gullible old bastard."

"That's enough," Parrotti said wearily. "You've tried the divide and conquer bit, Shayne, and it's just not going to work. This plan has paid off for all of us, and you're not going to stand in the way."

Shayne glared at Parrotti and then suddenly let his muscles go limp. He started to fold up, falling toward the desk, and Parrotti jumped up, saying, "Watch it, it may be a trick!"

But now the gun was out in the open, just where Shayne wanted it.

He lunged for it, his hand clamping down over the barrel. Parrotti pulled the trigger, but Shayne had already twisted the gun to the side, and the slug smacked into one of the cabin walls. With his other hand fairly worthless in a fight, Shayne had no choice but to plunge on over the desk, slamming into Parrotti and knocking them both to the floor.

Parrotti was cursing and struggling, and Shayne knew that he was too weak to stand up to a lengthy battle. This was no time for gentlemanly fighting. He brought his knee up savagely, making Parrotti shriek and turn white. The gun came loose in his fingers.

Shayne rolled off him and came to his feet, none too steadily. His head was swimming, but he saw Tarrant leaping at him. Shayne brought his hand around, slapping the gun barrel against the professor's head. Tarrant gave a groan and slumped to the floor.

Shayne pointed the gun at Stacy, who was anything but casual now. She had started toward the door of the office, but she stopped in her tracks when Shayne snapped, "Hold it!"

Parrotti was still half-stunned from the pain, but Shayne heard him moving around behind him. He risked a glance over his shoulder to locate the gambling boss, then kicked backwards, feeling his heel hit convincingly against Parrotti's head. That stretched him out

quietly again.

Shayne turned his attention back to Stacy. "You know where the bridge is on this ship, don't you?"

She nodded shakily, unable to take her gaze from the unwinking eye of the gun barrel.

"You're going to take me there," he grated. "And you're not going to try to pull anything. Nobody's raised an alarm yet, probably because they were expecting to hear a shot from in here when Parrotti finished me off. But any more shooting will bring people on the run. You raise a racket, and they'll probably get me. But you won't live to see it."

She believed him. And for a second, Shayne almost believed it himself.

"All right," she said. "I'll show you the controls. But there'll be at least two men there."

"We'll deal with them when the time comes. Check that companionway."

She opened the door slightly and peered out. "No one out there," she reported to Shayne.

"Then let's go." They slipped into the hall, leaving the unconscious forms of Parrotti and Tarrant behind them.

SHAYNE HAD NEVER BEEN TO THE BRIDGE of the *Silver Lagoon*, but he knew enough about boats to know that she was taking him in the right direction. They didn't encounter anyone on the way, and Shayne supposed that most of the crew members slept during the day. The ship was awake and alive all night; it made sense for it to be dormant during the day.

They ascended one ladder and went down a long companionway to a door. Stacy pointed toward it and said, "That's the bridge."

Shayne motioned her away from the door. He kept the gun trained on her as he reached gingerly toward the door handle with his sore arm. She said quietly, "You don't have to worry about me; I don't want a battle either. Too many slugs flying around."

"Smart," Shayne grunted. It sent little waves of pain up his arm as he turned the knob slowly, but he managed to do it quietly.

The door swung open nearly silently. He could see the two men sitting at the controls of the ship. It was anchored, dead in the water, so there was really nothing for them to do, other than sit there on duty, in case of emergency. They didn't seem to hear the door opening.

Shayne stepped back and silently pointed through the door. Stacy followed his instructions and slipped onto the bridge, Shayne right behind her. He took one long step and lashed out with the gun, left

and then right.

The two crew members didn't even have time to make a sound before they fell to the deck, out cold.

Shayne pushed the limp bodies to one side with his foot, then turned to Stacy, who was pale and watching him intently. He put the gun down on the console and said softly, "Come here, Stacy."

She stepped closer to him and said, "What are you going to do, Mike? You don't blame me for all this, do you?" Her voice was soft and tremulous.

"No, I don't blame you," Shayne said. His loosely-balled fist came up and clipped her on the jaw. He caught her with his good arm as she fell.

He put her with the two crewmen and then turned back to the controls. There was the sound of yelling from somewhere else in the ship. Shayne's fingers flew over the controls, working feverishly.

Now he could hear running footsteps coming down the hall, and he picked up the gun as he turned toward the door. As it burst open, he triggered two quick shots. There was a yelp, and he caught a glimpse of a crewman ducking back in a hurry.

The pistol was a revolver, and Shayne knew that it could only have three more shots in it, at the most. He couldn't hold off anybody very long with only three shots. There had to be something else he could use . . .

His eye fell on a storage compartment on the other side of the bridge, and in an instant, he had it open and was looking through it. His hopes soared. Inside was a Very pistol, standard equipment on a boat, and a whole box full of flares. He hauled it out quickly.

Parrotti was haranguing his men outside, urging them to charge the bridge.Shayne knew they would be doing so in only seconds. He fitted a flare into the Very pistol and waited. When he heard the running footsteps again, he jumped back into the center of the room and discharged the pistol out the door.

This time he heard plenty of howling as the crewmen dispersed. The whump of the flare going off reached his ears.

The more confusion the better, Shayne knew. That way, maybe no one would notice until too late that the ship's anchor had been raised and that it was starting to make headway toward the mainland.

Shayne reached over to the radio and clicked it on, locking it onto the Coast Guard frequency. He took the microphone and depressed the send button, jamming it in place with a coin from his pocket. In the back of his mind, he heard Parrotti shouting outside, but he didn't pay any attention until he had done what he started.

"Give it up, Shayne!" Parrotti yelled. "Make it easy on yourself! You know you can't get out of there alive!"

Shayne permitted himself a grim little smile. Maybe Parrotti was right. But maybe he wasn't. The ship was picking up speed now.

Shayne slammed two more shots down the corridor toward the concealed Parrotti and his men. That left him with one bullet in the pistol, he saw. But he still had the Very pistol and the flares.

There was a large glass window above the console on the bridge, giving a commanding view of the foredeck and the sea ahead. Shayne stuck both pistols in his belt, hefted the box of flares awkwardly in his good hand, and threw it right through the window.

The crewmen charged the room again at the shattering of the glass. Shayne climbed onto the console, kicked out the larger remaining chunks, and plunged through after the box of flares. The drop to the deck below was about ten feet, but he landed rolling and didn't hurt his shoulder too much more. The box had broken when it landed, and flares were scattered in a loose pile on the deck.

Parrotti and his men appeared above him in the broken window, and Shayne found himself jumping for cover as they opened up on him. The deck dropped another four feet a little further on, and he simply rolled off the edge.

The breath went out of him when he landed again, but he grabbed a lungful of air and snatched the Very pistol from his belt. It was loaded, and he sent the flare whistling into the pile of them on the upper deck.

It was better than any of the Fourth of July fireworks shows he had ever seen as a kid.

The flares went up with a whoosh, screaming off in all directions. Shayne ducked down again. He thought he could make it to the edge of the ship and dive off under the cover of the exploding flares.

He didn't have to. An amplified voice boomed out hugely, saying, *"Silver Lagoon! Heave to! You have entered the territorial waters of the United States! Prepare to be boarded and searched!"*

Through the smoke from the flares, Shayne saw the Coast Guard cutter that had loomed up beside them. And he saw the crewmen throwing down their weapons. They knew the game was over.

But Anthony Parrotti had jumped down from the bridge to the deck above Shayne, and his gun was still in his hand. He gave Shayne a sour smile. His white suit was dirty now.

"You win this round, Shayne," Parrotti said. "But what can they get me on? Kidnapping you? Running this gambling ship? There's no proof of anything else. And I can get the best lawyers in the world.

What's a few years? I'll see you again."

"I don't think so," Shayne said, his voice hard. "How long do you think you'll last in prison once your bosses find out what you tried to pull?"

Parrotti's eyes widened in sudden realization and terror. He stammered, "Y-you wouldn't. Shayne, y-you can't!"

"You had Gilliam killed. You tried to kill me. I can't afford not to." It was hard, but Shayne meant every word he said.

And then Parrotti's eyes went a little mad. He yelled, "You bastard!" and leveled the gun at Shayne. Shayne grabbed for his own pistol. It had one bullet left, if he had counted right.

He didn't get to use it. The Coast Guardsmen lined up at the rail of their ship opened fire, and Parrotti was tossed backwards, riddled by the bullets.

Shayne sighed and lowered his gun. He felt like hell, and he knew he'd be doing good to keep from passing out. And it was all over a bundle of mob money. Maybe he could talk whoever wound up with it into putting it into a worthy cause.

Like the University where Arthur Tarrant had taught.

Shayne realized his face had curved into a tired smile at the thought, and then he went forward to meet the confused Coast Guard captain who had boarded the *Silver Lagoon* with his men. This one was going to take some explaining.

After which, Shayne thought, all he wanted was a hot bath, a big glass of Martell, and the sympathetic ear of Lucy Hamilton.

That was better than blackjack any time. A sure thing, in fact. If you had a system . . . ●

NEXT MONTH

Mike Shayne returns

in

THREE STRIKES — YOU'RE DEAD!
By Brett Halliday

Don't miss it!

Something moved in the shadows, and Lansing heard the familiar sound of a cocking bolt snapped into place. "It's a machine pistol," a voice came from the darkness. "At this range, I can't miss."

Murder in Bonn

by W.L. FIELDHOUSE

MAJOR CLIFFORD LANSING KNELT BESIDE THE DEAD MAN. Although surrounded by the bright headlights of MP jeeps and blue *Polizei* Volkswagens, each with "a cherry on top," Lansing held a flashlight to examine the corpse, a young black man with hair trimmed short and a thin moustache. The victim's multi-colored T-shirt and Levi slacks suggested he was an American. A large number of black Africans had settled in West Germany, but Lansing was sure the man was a U.S. soldier in civilian clothes.

The Bonn *Polizei* also suspected the corpse was a member of the United States Army in Europe. They had contacted the nearest American military police station, while the German cops waited for the MPs to arrive, standing guard over the dead man to keep curious passersby at bay. A surprisingly small number of spectators had formed around the scene of the crime. Although nearly midnight, a killing on a city street generally draws a crowd.

Lansing rose and approached one of the military policemen, a muscular man, nearly as tall as Lansing himself. The MP wore a short-sleeved khaki uniform with a white "flying saucer cap," master sergeant stripes on his sleeve and a .45 pistol on his hip.

"He was shot twice in the chest," Lansing said. "Looks like a medium caliber weapon was used."

"Hell, Cliff," MSG Jim Snow said sheepishly, "you manage to talk General Clayton into giving you a three-day pass to come up here and pay me a visit. Now, we wind up putting you to work."

Lansing smiled. "You and I jumped out of too many planes together when we were back in 'Nam for me to just sit in your office when you have a murder on your hands."

"I'm not complaining," Snow assured him, folding his arms akimbo on his chest. "From what I've heard, you're the best homicide investigator in CID history."

"I try. Maybe the Bonn police have something for us."

"I'll tell my men to search the body for some identification," Snow said.

Lansing talked to the *Polizei* in fluent German, then walked back to Snow. "Did you find any ID yet, Sergeant?" he asked, addressing his old Airborne Ranger friend formally as other MPs were close by.

"Yes, sir," Snow replied, also observing military rank due to the nearness of his men. "We found the guy's wallet. His name was Louis Quinn, Specialist Fifth Class, Charlie Battery, Patterson Barracks." His voice stiffened slightly as he added, "He had a wife and two kids living on the economy."

"That makes it tough." Lansing nodded grimly, aware MSG Snow would have to notify the family. "All the civilians appear to be non-German," he remarked, noticing the swarthy-faced bystanders that casually watched the proceedings with only passing interest.

"As you know, sir, there are more *Auslanders* than *Deutschlanders* in West Germany," Snow said. "Most of the manual labor in this country is done by foreigners. This section of Bonn is a sort of ghetto of Turks, with a few Greeks sprinkled here and there. There are a lot of Turks in Northern Germany. About every third child born in West Germany is a Turk."

"That explains why no one is very concerned about this homicide," Lansing said. "Greeks and Turks don't get along too well. Violence is probably fairly common around here."

"Maybe, but there aren't very many murders here. Especially involving an American GI. In fact, this isn't the sort of district one generally sees Americans in. Tourists *or* soldiers. Did you have any luck with the German cops?"

"Apparently they don't get much cooperation from the locals around here." Lansing sighed. "A number of people admitted they heard gunshots, but only two claim to have seen anything. The witnesses said there was a Volkswagen parked by the curb near Quinn's body. Some-

body climbed into the car. One witness says *two* men got into the VW, the other witness isn't sure. The car sped away and neither noticed the number of its license plate."

"Swell," the Master Sergeant muttered. "Do you have any idea how many millions of Volkswagens are in this country? Hell, you and I both drive VW beetles."

"The killer's car was dark. One witness thinks it was dark blue, the other says it was dark green." Lansing shrugged. "It doesn't help much either way."

"Anything else, sir?" Snow asked, leading the Major away from the other MPs.

"The *Polizei* found a brown paper bag with three cartons of American cigarettes by Quinn's body. That suggests he was doing a little small-time black market. Of course, about three-fourths of USAEUR sell some cigarettes and booze on the side. It's against regulations, but hardly the sort of thing to get a man killed." Lansing went on, "The murder weapon was a nine-millimeter automatic. The cops found two spent cartridge casings."

"Guns are hard to get in this country."

"Not really, Jim," Lansing replied, since none of the enlisted men were close enough to hear him address the Master Sergeant by his first name. "Gun control in Germany hasn't been any more successful than it has been in New York, Chicago, Canada or England. Firearm restrictions make it tough for a law-abiding citizen to protect himself, but the illegal sale of guns by various criminal organizations allows a large supply of weapons to remain in the wrong hands. Believe me, Jim, I've found myself looking down a gun muzzle more than once since I've been stationed in Germany."

"Yeah, me too." Snow shrugged. "So where do we begin?"

"This is your case, Jim."

"It's *our* case," the MP sergeant insisted. "You outrank me and you have a helluva lot more experience at solving murders. Or have you gotten uppity since you made field grade?"

Lansing grinned. "Okay. We'll handle this one together. For old time's sake."

His expression changed to one of stern concentration as he caught a fleeting glimpse of two figures standing across the street. In the dim light, Lansing saw little but the outline of their bodies. Both figures were men, one small and thin, the other a head taller with broad shoulders and a barrel chest. Something about the pair seemed familiar. Before Lansing could get a better look at the men, they disappeared into an alley.

AS THE SENIOR NCO IN CHARGE OF THE 193RD MPS, MGS Snow didn't have any trouble drawing the late SP5 Quinn's personal 201 file from the record department at Ansbach. Quinn was the son of grocery store owner in Queens, New York. He joined the Army in 1976. Completing basic training and advanced individual training as a clerk-typist at Fort Jackson, Quinn served as a battery clerk in Fort Knox. As a SP4, he married and re-enlisted. His wife gave birth to twins, December 1979. Three months later, Quinn and his new family were transferred to Germany.

Lansing drove to Patterson Barracks. Although he'd never been to the installation before, the CID investigator had little difficulty finding Charlie Battery, thanks to the uniform construction of Army bases in general and USAEUR in particular. He parked his little white Volkswagen and entered the billets. Walking through a corridor, he soon located the orderly room.

"Atten-tion!" shouted a wiry first sergeant as he jumped from his chair to stand rigidly behind his desk.

A young private first class at a smaller desk, equipped with a typewriter, also snapped to attention. Lansing noticed another desk was unoccupied and he said, "As you were, gentlemen."

"What can we do for you, sir?" First Sergeant Kent inquired. He was tall and wiry, sporting the severe crew cut and immaculate uniform of a career soldier. Traces of Boston accented his words.

"I'm from the Criminal Investigation Department," Lansing explained, entering the orderly room and doffing his hat. "I'd like to talk to you about Spec-Five Quinn."

"Hopkins!" Kent snapped at the clerk. "Take a break. Five minutes." His tone suggested an additional minute would merit a General Court Martial.

"Yes, Sergeant," the PFC said, hurrying from the orderly room.

"I trust you know Specialist Quinn was murdered last night," the Major began. "Do you have any idea why anyone would want to kill him?"

"Not offhand, sir." Kent shrugged. "Of course, just about all of these New Army soldiers are into drugs and loose sex." He made no attempt to conceal his contempt for modern GIs.

"An MP friend of mine interviewed Mrs. Quinn earlier this morning. She says her husband wasn't into either."

"Maybe." Kent shrugged again. "She should have known him better than I did."

"She also said he didn't care much for you," Lansing remarked.

"Apparently he was trying to get transferred to another unit to avoid working for you. Why do you suppose he felt that way?"

"Most soldiers, especially the type we get in today's Army, don't like authority. A first sergeant *is* authority."

"Quinn was a battery clerk in the States. He didn't have any problems with his first sergeant then."

"Are you suggesting I'm prejudiced?" Kent asked flatly. "That I mistreated Quinn in some manner because he was a black?"

"No. I'm just trying to find out why you didn't get along with Specialist Quinn."

"He was a sorry excuse for a soldier. They're *all* sorry soldiers, sir."

"They?"

"All these new recruits who think the world owes them for . . . for something." The 1st Sergeant stammered slightly. "None of them want to work. None of them have any sense of duty."

"They only want to sit around and collect welfare, I suppose," Lansing commented dryly.

"*You* said it, sir." Kent smiled thinly. "*I* didn't."

"No, you didn't," Lansing admitted as he turned toward the exit. "By the way, do you drive a car?"

"Yes, sir. A 1978 Volkswagen. It's parked in the lot. You can't miss it. I had it painted OD green."

MSG JIM SNOW CHUCKLED AS HE SAT BEHIND HIS DESK at MP headquarters and listened to Lansing recall his conversation with the First Sergeant. "Sounds like Kent is a racist. I thought only Southern boys like me were supposed to be bigots. Hasn't Kent seen any movies?"

"Prejudice, like all forms of stupidity, knows no boundaries," Lansing mused as he helped himself to a cup of coffee.

"Neither does murder," Snow commented, placing a file folder on his desk. "I just came from the Bonn *Polizei* station. Wish you'd been there, Cliff. I had a hell of a time finding somebody who spoke English."

Lansing opened the folder and extracted a ballistics report in German with photographs of a misshaped slug. "Is this about the bullets they dug out of Quinn last night?" He frowned. "Why did the Germans run these tests? Didn't your people get the body last night?"

"We got *Quinn's* body," Snow replied. "That's the ballistics report on a nine-millimeter slug from one Ahmed Baliq. They found his body in a garbage dump this morning."

"Have you compared this ballistics report with the bullets found in

Quinn?"

"Yeah, and they match. Now, guess where the late Effendi Baliq was employed?"

"Patterson Barracks as a civilian kitchen patrol," Lansing answered.

"By golly, you really are a detective." Snow grinned. "According to his passport, Baliq was a Turk who immigrated to Germany last year. He's been working as a KP at Patterson for the last six months. Before that he was unemployed, apparently living on cash he brought from Turkey. The guy didn't have any relatives here either."

"That's unusual. Did the *Polizei* have an autopsy performed?"

Snow nodded grimly. "They sure did and the findings aren't pretty. Baliq suffered several blows to the head and torso. A couple ribs were cracked. Marks on his wrists and ankles suggested he was strapped down. It's no wonder if he was because somebody hooked some kind of electrical shocking device to his genitals. Baliq was probably grateful when he finally got a 9mm in the head."

"Do the *Polizei* have any leads?"

"Nope. Baliq hadn't committed any crimes, at least not in Germany, and the cops have no reason to believe he was involved in anything illegal." Snow shrugged. "Maybe they'll know more about him at Patterson Barracks. I'll question the mess sergeants, especially the NCOIC of Charlie Battery's mess hall, the cooks and the civilian KPs. Might find out if Baliq has any enemies. You want to come along, Cliff?"

"I think I'll try another angle," Lansing said thoughtfully. "Perhaps a search of Baliq's quarters will prove useful."

LANSING WAS ALMOST GLAD TO BE PART OF A TRAFFIC JAM in Bonn after driving on the *Autobahn*. Germans tend to ignore speed limits even more than Americans. Any car traveling at less than 80 miles per hour is barely crawling along the *Autobahn*. Lansing eventually escaped the jam and found his way to the Turkish section where Quinn's body had been discovered.

Locating the boarding house listed as Baliq's address, Lansing parked his VW by the curb and approached the building.

"Sir?" a thickly accented voice asked. "May I speak with you, sir?"

Lansing turned to face a swarthy young man with long black hair, bushy eyebrows and a great hawk-bill nose. His white short sleeve shirt was a sharp contrast to his dark complexion. His expression displayed urgency as he said, "You are here concerning Ahmed Baliq, Colonel?"

"I'm only a Major," Lansing corrected. "How did you know why I was here, Mister . . . ?"

"Mohammed Abdul Emlet," the young man replied, "I heard today that my friend Ahmed had been murdered. I know he worked for the American Army so I guessed you might be here to investigate his death."

"My name's Lansing and you're right. I am investigating Ahmed's homicide. Do you know if your friend had any enemies?"

"I do not know the man's name, but I do know of one man who may want to kill Ahmed."

"You know *about* him, but you don't know his name?" Lansing raised his eyebrows, "Please, elaborate."

"There are many Greeks here," Emlet said. "They have always hated my people. Most Turks are Moslems, most Greeks are Catholics. This difference in religion alone has caused conflict since the Crusades. We disagree with the Greeks about Cyprus and other political issues. Greeks still fight with Turks even here in Germany. They argue about jobs, politics or simple blind prejudice."

"Has anyone been killed before, due to such arguments?"

"Not killed, no," Emlet admitted. "But many have been injured. Greeks like to use knives." He smiled slightly, "So do we Turks. Ahmed argued with a Greek last week. They both pulled knives. He cut the Greek quite badly. I suspect the Greek got a gun to even his score with Ahmed."

"Do you know this Greek's name?"

"No, sir." Emlet shrugged. "Ahmed did not know his name, but he told me he slashed the Greek's face. Like this." He drew the tip of his finger under his eye to the middle of his cheek. "A man with such a disfigurement may want revenge, yes?"

"Whoever killed your friend wasn't gentle," Lansing said, recalling the grisly autopsy report. "Why would this Greek kill the American serviceman we discovered last night."

"Perhaps he thought the American was a Turk. In the darkness he may not have noticed the man was black. He was also dressed in civilian clothing, yes?"

"Maybe." The Major nodded. "Thanks for the information. Where can I get in touch with you if we have any more questions or we uncover any new leads?"

"I recently moved from my former residence. Right now I am staying with friends but I should have a new place either today or tomorrow. Perhaps you could tell me how to contact you instead, Major."

Lansing gave him MSG Snow's phone number.

"Thank you, sir." Emlet bowed slightly. "I will stay in touch and tell you if I find out more about the scar-faced Greek. No one hopes more than I that Ahmed's killer will be brought to justice."

"By the way, how long have you known Ahmed?"

"We came from Turkey at the same time. I guess that's why we became friends as we were bonded together as strangers in a foreign land. Most of the Turks have been in this country so long they act and think more like Germans. I suppose that's the reason Ahmed and I had no real friends except one another."

"I'm sorry. His death must be tough for you."

"Allah will see me through my grief," Emlet assured him. "May He also grant you success in your search for Ahmed's murderer."

Emlet bowed once more, then turned and walked casually from the boarding house. As Lansing watched the Turk depart, he noticed two men standing by a parked Datsun. It was the same "Mutt and Jeff" team he'd seen the night before. The taller, more muscular man glared at Lansing as his smaller companion pretended to scratch his forehead, trying to conceal his face. The pair quickly climbed into the car and soon pulled away from the curb. As he watched the Datsun speed up the street, Lansing was certain of their identity, just as he was certain they recognized him.

Good old Yuri and Ezra of the Mossad. Now, what would two Israeli intelligence agents be doing around here? Lansing wondered, as he turned and entered the boarding house.

The landlord, a stocky middle-aged German, was eager to help Lansing and the entire United States Army any way he could. After all, the War was quite a few years ago and his country and Lansing's had been fast friends for a long time. Actually, he confided, he was part of the German underground against Hitler back in the '40s. Of course, he joined the army, but that was part of his disguise, his "cover" as the American's say. Finally, Lansing managed to explain why he was there. The landlord nearly fainted with relief to learn it was only a murder investigation. He gladly allowed Lansing to borrow a passkey and told him where to find Ahmed Baliq's room.

Mounting the stairs, Lansing located the door with the right room number and unlocked it. The dead man's quarters were simple, with scant furniture, no private bathroom and a bare wooden floor. Searching under the bed and mattress proved uneventful. Opening the dresser drawers, Lansing poked through the pockets of Baliq's clothing and found nothing. Sharing a drawer with some neatly rolled underwear was a half empty carton of German cigarettes and a few words in

ornately curved and dotted Arabic script written on a small pad of paper. Lansing slipped the last item into his pocket and pulled the door open.

A tall dark man with a drooping black moustache stood in the doorway. A compact blue-black pistol in his fist was aimed at Lansing's chest.

"What are you doing here, American?" the stranger demanded gutterally.

"You tell me." Lansing raised his hands slowly as the shock of unexpectedly encountering a hostile man with a gun caused fear-induced adrenaline to pump through his body.

"Get back into the room," the gunman ordered.

Lansing stepped backward as the man prepared to enter the room, raising the pistol until the muzzle stared into the Major's face. Moving his left hand slightly, hoping to distract the stranger without startling him into pulling the trigger, Lansing turned sharply and slapped the door with his right. Throwing his weight into the door, he slammed it hard on the man's arm a few inches above the fist holding the gun.

Lansing heard the man groan as his arm was painfully trapped between door and frame, but he still held the pistol, a Walther PPK. The stranger didn't fire his weapon. He began to kick the door hard, trying to force it open far enough to free his captive arm.

Closing his fist around the frame of the Walther, Lansing twisted hard. Bone crunched as the finger remained in the trigger guard. Yet the man still did not cry out. Lansing removed the gun from the damaged hand and jumped away from the door. The stranger was still kicking the door. It flew open.

"Why don't you come in and we'll have a little chat?" the American suggested, pointing the man's own pistol at him.

Although pain caused his eyes to water and a thin film of perspiration coated his features, the tall dark man calmly cradled his broken finger in his undamaged hand. "I have nothing to say to you," he announced tensely. "I demand to speak to your American embassy."

MAJOR LANSING POURED HIMSELF A CUP OF COFFEE as MSG Jim Snow angrily paced across the floor of his office. "The sonofabitch wouldn't say anything except that he wants to talk to *our* embassy." Snow clucked his tongue with disgust. "What do you make of it, Cliff?"

"I don't know," Lansing admitted. "This Hason Maadak, if the name on his passport is for real, is a cool customer. He calmly allowed

me to tie his hands behind his back with his own belt and he was as docile as a sheep when I took him down to my car and drove back here. He didn't utter a word until I brought him to you."

"Well, I resisted the urge to try beating some answers out of him. I finally called the damn embassy." Snow sighed. "Would you believe they told me to hold him until they can send somebody over here?"

"Did you turn up anything when you talked to the mess personnel at Patterson Barracks today?"

"Not a damn thing," Snow muttered sourly. "Ahmed Baliq did his work and kept his mouth shut. I guess the strong-silent-type is a Turkish tradition or something. Anyway, the guy kept to himself. He didn't associate with the other KPs, but he didn't do anything to piss them off either. No friends, no enemies."

"He had at least one enemy," Lansing mused.

"Obviously," Snow agreed. "But what about Maadak and the U.S. embassy? What's going on, Cliff?"

"Maybe we're about to find out," Lansing said as a tall, athletically-fit man in a lightweight blue suit appeared in the doorway.

"Major Lansing and Sergeant Snow?" the man asked. He was an American, about thirty, with blond hair slightly longer than military dress codes allowed. A slight bulge under his left arm suggested he carried more than an extra pen beneath his suit jacket.

"You got it, Mister . . . ?" Snow replied.

"Stoner."

"Are you from the embassy?"

Stoner shook his head. As he produced a leather ID case from a jacket pocket, the soldiers noticed part of a leather strap to Stoner's shoulder holster. "Central Intelligence Agency. I've come to claim custody of one Hason Maadak."

"Custody?" Snow frowned. "What does the CIA want with that bastard?"

"Sorry, I really can't say," Stoner said.

"Crap!" Snow exclaimed. "He pulled a gun on an officer of the United States Army. He's also a suspect in a double murder case and one of those victims was an American serviceman. Doesn't anybody give a damn about that?"

"I appreciate your position, Sergeant," Stoner told him. "Please try to appreciate mine."

"Tell us what you can, Mister Stoner," Lansing urged.

"Fair enough." The CIA man nodded. "The Company wants to hold Maadak for an undetermined length of time. I don't know how long we'll detain your prisoner nor would I be at liberty to reveal such

information if I knew it. We may be able to return him to your custody in a day or two. That's really all I can explain at this time."

"Is this a matter of national security?" Snow inquired.

"That's part of what we have to determine," Stoner answered,

"Okay, Stoner, if that's really your name," Snow growled, "Let's go get your prisoner."

After the CIA man left with Maadak, Snow turned to Lansing, "Well, do you think we just let him *borrow* our killer?"

"The murder weapon was a nine-millimeter," Lansing said. "Maadak's gun was a Walther PPK. 7.65 millimeter."

"He could have two guns."

"True," Lansing admitted. "Jim, if you hurry you might be able to get some information from the German immigration bureau before the Company pulls everything out of their files concerning Hason Maadak."

"I'll try. What are you going to be doing?"

"Paying a visit to some old acquaintances," the Major replied.

A NEATLY DRESSED, BLACK-HAIRED MAN with a smooth oval face and a pencil-thin moustache waited by the entrance of the Israeli embassy in Bonn. The wiry Ezra and burly Yuri stood behind the dapper figure as Lansing mounted the stone steps of the building.

"Nice to see you again, Major," the man greeted. "It's been about a year since we met, hasn't it?"

"Give or take a month or two, Captain Zavarj," Lansing replied.

"It's Major Zavarj now." The Israeli smiled. "Of course, you remember Yuri and Ezra."

"I've seen them around."

"So you said on the phone." Turning to his countrymen, Zavarj said, "Major Lansing and I will talk now. I won't need you."

The pair slipped into the embassy. Yuri lingered to stare vehemently at Lansing before entering the building.

"I'm afraid he doesn't like you, Major," Zavarj commented as he led Lansing back down the stairs.

"I guess I'll just have to live with that," the American replied. "Why is *Mossad* interested in the case I'm investigating?"

"That's why you wanted to see me?"

"Last time our paths crossed, I wound up with a helluva headache," Lansing recalled, "I'd rather come here on my own than have 'Twiddle-Dum and Twiddle-Dee' from Tel Aviv take me to you."

"That was an unfortunate accident, Major." Zavarj sighed. "It won't happen again. As for our involvement in your current investiga-

tion: We have to be certain if Israeli national interests are threatened in any way."

"Are they?"

"By the murder of an American enlisted man and a Turkish dishwasher?" Zavarj chuckled. "Hardly."

"What if this Turk wasn't a Turk?"

"Oh?"

"I found a note pad in Baliq's room at the boarding house. Arabic script was written on the paper. The Turkish language is written in Roman letters, the same as most European languages, including English."

"Interesting," Zavarj admitted. "But many Moslems, even Moslems of non-Arabic countries, are familiar with Arabic. It is the language of the Koran, the Islamic holy book. Moslems of all nations study Arabic just as Jews throughout the world study Hebrew."

"That's a possible explanation," Lansing agreed.

"But you have another theory?"

"Another possibility," Lansing corrected. "Baliq may have been from the Middle East, perhaps Lebanon. He may be a member of the PLO or a similiar terrorist organization. Perhaps he's part of a plot along the line of the Munich/Olympic Village incident. Maybe *Mossad* has tracked him down to settle an old score or two. Your people have conducted more than one vengeance-oriented hit in Europe. I seem to recall a time in 1973 when *Mossad* wasted the wrong man in Norway."

"Nobody's perfect." Zavarj shrugged. "I admit we'd be interested in Baliq if he was a member of the PLO or *Al Fatah*, but why would we kill an American serviceman. We're professionals, Major."

"So was the team in Norway."

"Really, Major." The Israeli sighed. "That fellow was a Syrian. The United States and Israel are allies."

"But Specialist Quinn was a black man in civilian clothes, so he may not have appeared to be an American. Besides, your man Yuri tends to forget who Israel's allies are. He's apt to crack skulls and ask questions later."

"That again." Zavarj rolled his eyes. "I assure you, Yuri has mellowed since you met him last year."

"He's a real pussycat," Lansing said dryly. "I don't suppose you're going to tell me what *Mossad* is doing in the middle of all this."

"I can only say that it may concern Israeli national interests. Check with me in a day or two. Perhaps I can explain everything then."

"Yeah," Lansing muttered. "I've heard this song before — recently."

MSG JIM SNOW PLACED A BOTTLE OF SCOTCH ON HIS DESK as Lansing entered the MP's office. Opening a desk drawer, Snow produced two shot glasses. "Feel like fraternizing with an enlisted man, Major?" he asked, opening the bottle.

"Drinking on duty, Jim?" Lansing asked.

"I've been off duty since five o'clock." Snow poured the scotch carefully into each glass. "I mean 1700 hours."

"A good soldier is never off duty."

"That's a bunch of crap."

Lansing grinned. "Just one shot for me."

"I'm having a double," Snow announced. "Maybe a couple of them." As he put down the bottle, he said, "I beat the CIA to the records on Hason Maadak. He's listed as a Turkish immigrant working at the Hessler Air Conditioning Company as part of an assembly line. I didn't find anything to explain why the CIA wants the sumbitch, but Maadak and the late Baliq arrived in Germany the same month and day. Interesting, eh?"

"This case is just full of interesting tidbits," Lansing said, sipping his Scotch. "Let's review our information. *Mossad* doesn't poke its nose into every homicide that occurs in West Germany, but they wanted to know about Baliq. Despite Zavarj's comments about the Koran and Islamic studies, I suspect the Arabic script in Baliq's room is evidence he's not a Turk. I'd say it's more than likely Maadak isn't Turkish either."

"Then, if they're Arabs, that rules out the theory that that Turkish kid . . . what's his name? Emlet? All these wogs have funny names."

"They probably feel the same way about us," Lansing mused.

"Anyway, Emlet's theory that some unknown Greek killing Baliq must be wrong."

"Not necessarily," Lansing said. "If Baliq slashed the man's face in a brawl, the Greek wouldn't care what his nationality was. Besides, everyone thought Baliq was Turkish. Revenge by a disfigured individual is still a possible motive."

"Well, at least we can discard First Sergeant Kent as a suspect. He may have wanted to kill Quinn for some reason, but why torture and murder Baliq?"

"I've only been able to think of one possibility concerning Kent," the Major said. "Specialist Quinn was apparently selling cigarettes and possibly liquor to civilians. Thousands of USAEUR personnel deal in such petty blackmarket. GIs can buy such items for a very low price

in the PX, sell it to German nationals or other civilians for a sizeable profit, and the buyers in turn sell the same goods for an even higher price."

"I know. American whiskey is very popular in this country. The Germans make great beer, but the only decent hard liquor they produce is schnapps. A kraut tavern can make a helluva profit with just a single bottle of Jack Daniels. Same with cigarettes. German tobacco is bone dry. *Deutschlanders* will pay up to three *Marks* for a pack of American smokes." The MP shrugged. "So what's that have to do with Kent being a murder suspect?"

"It explains why Quinn was selling cigarettes to Baliq," Lansing replied. "What father of twins couldn't use extra cash, especially since inflation and the devaluation of the American dollar? Now, suppose Sergeant Kent suspected Quinn was dealing a little small-time black market. He obviously wanted to get rid of Quinn. If Kent could catch him red-handed selling PX goods to a civilian, he'd be able to press charges and probably put Quinn in front of a court martial. So, Kent may have followed Quinn, hoping to nail him in the act. He tailed Quinn into the Turkish section and watched him sell goods to Baliq, Maadak or both. For some reason, he was suspicious of the buyers. Perhaps one of them was carrying something Kent thought was a concealed weapon.

"Kent followed one or both men and discovered they're members of the PLO or some other terrorist organization. If Kent is a totally paranoid racist, he might assume Quinn was part of some sort of Third World conspiracy. Would he report it? Not without more proof and not if he thought there were more co-conspirators among the Army's ranks. He'd want more information. He bought a 9mm pistol from a crooked pawnshop and tracked Quinn into 'Little Turkey' again. He found Quinn with Baliq. Perhaps Quinn made a sudden move Kent mistook as an aggressive action, so he shot him. Kent then captured Baliq, took him God knows where and tried to wring information out of him. Maybe Baliq refused to talk, maybe he told Kent that Quinn was innocent. Kent 'executed' Baliq and tossed his body in the garbage dump. Needless to say, he couldn't uncover any sinister conspiracy to justify his vigilante conduct."

Snow shook his head. "That seems pretty far fetched to me, Cliff."

Lansing shrugged. "It's just a possibility."

"I'd say the Israelis did it," Snow said. "Hell, from what you told me about the other time you ran into those three, the one called Yuri has a mean streak big enough to drive your car on."

"No one in clandestine work wears a halo, Jim," Lansing said. "But

Yuri is one of the most heavy-handed agents I've ever met. That doesn't mean he'd shoot down a man in cold blood and torture a suspected PLO terrorist. I don't know if Major Zavarj would tolerate that sort of thing."

"If Baliq was a PLO creep, we can assume Maadak is also one of Yassir Arafat's fatheads. That might explain the CIA's interest in the matter. Maadak might be the key to an entire terrorist operation in Germany." Snow frowned. "But why would an *El Fatah* flunky demand to talk to an American embassy? Wouldn't he want to talk to a Syrian or Lebanonese or even a Jordan embassy?"

"Curious indeed," Lansing agreed. "I was rather impressed by Maadak's professional calm. His only mistake was holding his gun too far from his body and allowing me to slam the door on his arm. Maadak probably thought all Americans are soft and stupid."

"He isn't too bright to goof up that way."

"He isn't soft either. He barely uttered a sound when I broke his finger while disarming him. Maadak didn't panic. An amateur might have pulled the trigger, but he didn't. He tried to force the door open far enough to free his arm. When he realized I had him cold, he kept his cool and demanded to speak to our embassy."

"Wait a minute!" Snow exclaimed, "What if Maadak is on the Company's pay roll? The guy might be an undercover agent of some sort. Maybe he'd infiltrated a PLO operation that either *Mossad* or Sergeant Kent stumbled upon. Hell, he may have thought you were part of some kind of Army 'death squad' and that's why he pulled a gun on you."

"A lot of 'maybes' in this case," Lansing mused.

"Damn! All this espionage stuff is out of my field," the MP muttered, "Spies and terrorists running all over the place. We don't know the good guys from the bad anymore."

"Sometimes it's hard to tell," Lansing admitted, recalling a case a few months earlier. He'd uncovered a Soviet "sleeper agent" who successfully infiltrated U.S. Army Intelligence. "Well, we know Ahmed Baliq wasn't really a Turk and we suspect Maadak isn't one either. What if they aren't Arabs either?"

"Cliff," Snow sighed. "This case is confusing enough without any more wild theories."

"It's not so wild, Jim. Arabic, like English, Spanish, and French, is an international language. Arabic is spoken and written in many parts of Africa, the Persian Gulf, Pakistan, Afghanistan and other countries. Even the fifty million Moslems in the Soviet Union still use Arabic more than Russian."

"Hell, don't tell me this might be a KGB operation," Snow muttered. "I think I'll have another drink."

"All possibilities should be considered."

"Yeah, but unfortunately you'll only be here one more day before your pass is over and you'll have to head back to your headquarters in Bavaria."

"If I call General Clayton, I'm certain he'll assign me to investigate Quinn's death officially for the CID," the Major assured him, "Of course, we might be able to solve this case *tonight.*"

"Really?" Snow asked, holding his glass of Scotch poised near his mouth. "What have you got in mind?"

"Maadak didn't just happen to be in that hallway with a PPK in his hand."

"I don't know why he had the gun, but Maadak was probably in the building because he has a room in the same boarding house. So do about two hundred other Turks . . . or supposed Turks."

"Right." Lansing nodded. "Maadak wanted something in Baliq's room."

"The note written in Arabic!" Snow exclaimed, slamming his glass down hard.

Lansing shook his head. "I had it translated by a Saudi Arabian who owns a tobacco shop a couple blocks from the Israeli embassy. Baliq's note was nothing but a shopping list. Bread, cheese, tea and toilet paper. Not very sinister."

"Then what *did* Maadak want?"

"Perhaps he only wanted to be certain Baliq hadn't left anything of an incriminating nature in the room," Lansing replied. "But, just as Maadak was interested in Baliq's room, maybe *someone else* will be interested in *his.*"

"You plan to stake out the boarding house?"

Lansing nodded.

"The CIA has probably already been there."

"You know that and I know that, but does the killer?"

"Do you know who the killer is?"

"I think so," the Major replied. "But we have to be sure."

"Do you have a gun?" Snow asked.

"I didn't think I'd need one just to visit an old 'jump' buddy."

"That's what I figured." The MP opened a desk drawer and produced a Government Issue 1911 Coit. "I drew an extra .45 from the arms room. After your encounter with Maadak this afternoon, I thought you might need it."

"Thanks." Lansing took the big Colt Pistol.

"Don't mention it. Just make sure you don't get yourself killed. I've gotta return that gun."

MAJOR LANSING WAITED, HIS LONG BODY FOLDED inside his diminutive Volkswagen feeling cramped and stiff. Parked across the street from the boarding house, Lansing's vigil was approaching its third hour when he finally saw a familiar figure enter the building. Excited by the expectation of capturing his quarry, Lansing turned the ignition key to allow the engine to warm up while he waited once again. Fifteen minutes later, the suspect emerged from the boarding house and walked to a VW parked by the curb. The car was yellow, but Lansing didn't expect him to be careless enough to return to the scene of the crime in the dark Volkswagen used the night Quinn was murdered.

The yellow VW pulled away from the curb. Lansing shifted gears and steered into the road. He followed the suspect's car carefully, allowing other vehicles to move between them. Still, he didn't lose sight of the yellow car as it drove to the outskirts of the city. Lansing watched the suspect pull into a driveway by an ill-treated, two-story building.

Passing the structure, Lansing drove nearly a quarter of a mile be fore he pulled off the road and turned off the engine. Picking up the .45, he worked the slide to chamber the first round, put the safety on and slipped it into the borrowed flap holster on his hip. A hard knot of cold fear formed in his stomach as he prepared to face a murderer under largely unknown circumstances.

Cautjously, Lansing approached the building. Moving in the dense shadows, Lansing held the pistol in his fist and watched the windows, half expecting to hear the report of a 9mm and see the muzzle flash of the killer's gun at any second.

Lansing reached the entrance. The building was an old abandoned structure, probably condemned. The door was missing, so Lansing didn't have to worry about creaking hinges as he entered. Stepping into a dark hallway, he strained his eyes, trying to identify shapes among the shadows. One shape moved and Lansing heard the familiar sound of cocking bolt snapping into place.

"It's a machine pistol," a thickly accented voice warned. "I'm not apt to miss at this range, so just drop your gun and kick it over here."

Lansing swallowed hard, but his mouth was dry. He could try to blast the shadowy figure, but even if he succeeded the man could still spray him with bullets. The Major obeyed instructions and raised his hands.

"Mehdi! Ali!" the shadowy form shouted.

Footfalls overhead told Lansing the gunman wasn't alone. A flashlight beam from above revealed a rotted, wooden staircase. Two slender male figures descended the steps. The light danced across Lansing's face, forcing his eyes to squint in the glare.

"Well, Major Lansing!" a voice declared. "How did you get here?"

"I drove part of the way and walked the rest," Lansing replied. "You might as well tell me your real name now."

Allowing the flashlight to illuminate his features, the young man who'd introduced himself to Lansing as "Mohammed Abdul Emlet" said, "I'm Mehdi Fawzi. These are my *Fedyreen*, Ali and Nasser."

"I hoped you wouldn't keep me in the dark," Lansing said dryly.

"Oh, of course," Emlet/Fawzi said. "Light the lamp, Ali."

The other man on the stairs descended then and moved to a corner of the hallway. Striking a match, he lit a kerosene lantern, filling the hall with flickering yellow light. Ali was almost as tall as Lansing. His bony face sported a drooping moustache and a short, pointy beard. The checkered grips of a 9mm Heckler & Koch pistol jutted from his belt. Nasser, the third member of the group, still held his machine pistol, a .380 M11 Ingram, trained on Lansing. Short and stocky, Nasser reminded Lansing of the late Peter Lorre.

"Isn't that better?" Fawzi inquired as he bent to retrieve Lansing's pistol. "Now, perhaps you'll repay us by explaining how you knew about us, Major."

"Actually, I didn't know about your two friends here," Lansing admitted. "You shouldn't have told me all that crap about coming from Turkey with Baliq. After I discovered he wasn't Turkish that meant you were lying about *your* nationality as well. It was safe to assume your story about Ahmed and the scar-faced Greek was another fib, designed to throw me off the track."

"How did you know Baliq wasn't Turkish?" Fawzi asked, aiming Lansing's own .45 at his chest.

"I discovered some Arabic script in his room. The *Mossad* was interested in my investigation, so I thought he might have been a member of the PLO. The CIA was involved too, but that might be PLO-related too. However, since you were trying to give me a bum steer, and I never heard of Arab terrorists killing other Arab terrorists in Europe, I needed another explanation."

Fawzi smiled grimly. "And what is your theory?"

"You're Iranians," Lansing replied. "I suspect when the Shah fled Iran over a year and a half ago, many of his secret police, the SAVAK,

also ran for their lives, Baliq and Maadak, or whatever their real names are, pretended to be Turks and shuffled into Europe to escape your revolution and Khomeni's bloody justice."

"All you Americans cry about the Ayatollah's actions!" Ali snarled. "None of you care that SAVAK murdered, tortured and mistreated our people for years! No, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi was America's little puppet in Iran. Anything that butcher of a Shah did was all right with you!"

"Ali," Fawzi snapped. "Get the car ready. We'll be taking the Major for a little ride."

Ali smiled viciously, turned and hurried out the exit.

"So, you decided Baliq and Maadak were SAVAK?" Fawzi observed.

"It explains why Baliq had enough money to live on for several months and Maadak's reason for carrying a gun and later requesting to see an American embassy. A SAVAK agent would know a great deal about Tehran. Considering the conflict between Iran and the United States, the Company would be more than slightly interested in any information about the country. Maadak might even know where some of our more sophisticated weapons are hidden. *Mossad's* interest in the case is much the same. After all, Israel is in the Middle East. If the Russians take over Iran, which doesn't seem at all unlikely, *Mossad* would want to know as much about Persian defense and offense ability as possible."

"And how do *we* fit in?" Fawzi asked, apparently amused.

"You're anti-Shah terrorists, like those gun wielding 'students' that took over the American embassy and held fifty American hostages." Lansing didn't attempt to conceal his contempt. "You were probably a college student in the United States. That's another mistake you made when you spoke to me this morning. You were too familiar with American expressions such as 'even the score' to be an immigrant from Turkey who'd barely been in Germany a year."

"That's right, Lansing," Fawzi admitted poking the soldier in the ribs with the muzzle of the Colt. "Like to hear about how many American flags I burned?"

"I can imagine," Lansing replied. "I suppose you killed Quinn because he was in your way."

"The SAVAK were well hidden," Fawzi said, "We couldn't be certain when we'd get another chance to capture Zedhi, the man you call Baliq. It was unfortunate that we had to kill the black man, but sometimes innocent bystanders must be sacrificed."

"Yeah, that's the terrorists' style isn't it?" Lansing muttered. "The

end justifies the means and all that garbage."

"You don't understand," Fawzi said, no longer smiling. "The Shah was a tyrant and his SAVAK police were worse than the Gestapo. Do you blame us for wanting to overthrow a dictator? Wouldn't you want to punish the men who abused your sisters and daughters? Who tortured and murdered your relatives and friends?"

"None of that excuses what you've done," Lansing told him. "If you only struck at those individuals who had wronged you, if you kept your revolution in your own country, among your own people, you might have my sympathy." Lansing shook his head. "But people like you don't care who they hurt in order to achieve their goals. That's why you're no better than the tyrants and stormtroopers you oppose."

"A lecture," Fawzi sneered. "I hope you enjoyed it, Lansing, because those are your last words."

"Wanta bet?" Master Sergeant Snow asked as he stepped through the doorway with a .45 in his hands.

Nasser swung his Ingram to aim at Snow, but the MP's pistol boomed. The Iranian was hurled backward by the force of a .45 slug in the chest. He pulled the machine pistol's trigger and fired three harmless rounds into the ceiling before he fell to the floor, dead.

Lansing acted as quickly. With a *kiya* shout, he chopped the side of his hand across Fawzi's wrist. The ringleader of the terrorist trio dropped the Colt. Before Fawzi could gather his wits, Lansing smashed the back of his fist into the Iranian's face, knocking him to the floor. Fawzi stared up at the muzzle of Snow's pistol.

"Why don't you just relax for a little while, fella?" the MP suggested.

"You took your time getting here, Jim," Lansing said. as he picked up the gun he'd chopped out of Fawzi's grasp.

"I didn't expect to run into that joker outside," Snow explained. "He'll wake up with a headache, but he ought to be able to stand trial. I took this off him." He pulled Ali's H&K pistol from his belt. "It's a nine-millimeter. I think we might have our murder weapon, Cliff."

"You didn't come alone?" Fawzi muttered, wiping blood from his split lip with the back of his hand.

"No, Sergeant Snow followed me in his car and then waited outside while I approached the house," Lansing explained. "I thought a back up man would be a good idea." He smiled. "We still make a good team, Jim."

"Yeah," Snow agreed. "Too bad you have to leave tomorrow."

"My pass is up." Lansing shrugged. "I've goofed off long enough. Now, I'll have to get back to work." ●

The Bouchercon Report

by ANN BYERLY

BOUCHERCON XI, A CONVENTION OF MYSTERY and detection literature fans and authors in memorial to mystery writer and critic, Anthony Boucher, was held Columbus Day weekend (October 10-12, 1980) at the National Press Club, Washington, D.C. The convention's theme, chosen by "Co-Conspirators" Peter E. Blau and Jon L. Lellenberg, contrasted fictional espionage and mystery stories set in Washington with the actual intrigue and counter-intelligence which goes on there, with a sidelight on the reporter as detective featuring the Guest of Honor, former newspaperman Gregory Macdonald, MWA Edgar Award-winning author of the *Fletch* books, *Flynn*, and

the new *Who Took Toby Rinaldi?* The *Washington Post* and *Star* were covering the event, so the choice of the Press Club was a very fitting one.

What made it even more fitting were its facilities and atmosphere. The grand ballroom, where Presidents and other newsmakers regularly hold press conferences, was spacious enough for two blocks of comfortable chairs sufficient to accommodate about 250 people, leaving ample leg room, and thoughtfully divided into "smoking" and "non-smoking" sections. The stage at the far end, trapped with fading gold-trimmed red curtains, was a prerequisite for the convention but was also used for a short theatrical presentation. The hard wood floor, the walls bristling with state flags and studded with glass ornaments, and the ceiling encrusted with painted plaster embellishments from which dangled electric crystal chandeliers made attenders feel like visiting dignitaries. Passing a cozy bar tucked in a corner, and a wire service machine, one was surrounded by the lounge's padded easy chairs, outcroppings of aged upholstry, dark wood paneling, stuffed owl, grandfather clock, some sort of anthropomorphic African statue about seven feet tall judiciously hidden in the shadow of the fireplace, and, above, a carved, balustraded balcony upon which, on first glance, flitted the image of a Renaissance consort. On that upper floor, reached by a seemingly secret stairway entered near the bar, were three or four dealers displaying mostly rare editions and out-of-print mysteries, and whose free lists circulated to hushed croons of desire throughout the weekend.

THE BOUCHERCON ATTENDERS WERE A MIXED BUNCH. At a general mystery convention one expects to find compulsive, omnivorous mystery readers; however, there was a large proportion of narrowly but deeply read people: the Nero Wolfe fans, the Sherlock Holmes and Victorian detective fans, the hard boiled detective or country house mystery fans, etc. With a mixture like this it was guaranteed that anyone you spoke with would increase *your* knowledge of the literature as much as you increased *his.*

Bouchercon had been given advance publicity in the press and on a local public radio station, with the result that there were about 30 walk-ins Friday night, and more the next two days. By the end of the weekend attenders totalled 280, 138 of whom had preregistered, and about 20% of whom had been to more than one Bouchercon before. Special rates had been arranged for one-day attenders, who were further accommodated with a separate doorprize drawing.

The doorprizes, twice facetiously claimed by Macdonald when the numbers called elicited no response, included both current and rare items. Winners of new things were quick to have them autographed; one winner in this category proved to be Anthony Boucher's granddaughter.

THE PROGRAM WAS FULL, ITS UNUSUAL NON-FICTION BIAS reasonably counterbalanced, but so full that the following coverage must be of highlights only.

The first panel, *The Movies: What Happened to My Book?,* eagerly awaited by an expectant audience, was lively and entertaining, combining the experiences of novelists James Grady *(Six Days of the Condor)* and Brian Garfield *(Hopscotch)* in having their works transformed, like Jekyll into Hyde, from book into movie. Grady optimistically stated that despite the pain, he was so appreciative of the break of a lifetime he couldn't protest. "You can't say, 'They ruined my book,'" bolstered Garfield. "The book is always there on the shelf." A different perspective came from British author Michael Hardwick, whose novelizations of *Upstairs, Downstairs* and *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* have earned him erroneously placed fame for having written the originals. He, too, had been victimized by film directors' tampering. When, after novelizing *The Private Life* in the record time of three weeks, he learned that director Billy Wilder had decided to cut the film by almost 50%. Hardwick had two days to revise the book, eliminating a series of scenes, characters, subplots, and balancing what the reader should and should not know as a result of these changes.

The classic film, *G-Men* (Warner Brothers, 1935), starring James Cagney, closed the evening and gave late attenders something to think about as they walked the cold, dark Washington pavement back to their hotels.

IRONICALLY, AS WE LEARNED AT THE START of the unfortunately sparsely populated Saturday morning session from Phyllis White, Boucher's widow, even the convention was going under an assumed name: "Boucher" was a pseudonym. His real name was William Anthony Parker White.

Breaking Into Print, intended to share the adventures of Hope Dellon, Patricia Gaffney, Sheila Martin, and Joel Swerdlow in getting a first book printed and to assess the status of mystery publication today, decayed into a gripe session due to the ineptitude of the modera-

tor. Its tone after half an hour was so pessimistic that a woman in the audience stood up, identified herself as an editor for Ballantine Books, and announced in a loud voice that they were interested in publishing mysteries. She sat down to loud applause. At the end of the discussion the moderator asked people in the audience who had written a fiction mystery, published or not, to raise their hands; the fact that almost a third of them did explains how the audience sat attentively through this disorganized, often inaudible presentation.

Support Your Local FBI promised to be nothing but dull when Sean McWeeney, an FBI agent for over 15 years and Chief of the Organized Crime Section at FBI Headquarters, began to read a hopelessly dry and mildly informative paper on organized crime; but when, after fifteen minutes of this, he paused and invited questions, the audience came to life with so many practical queries of specific interest he never finished reading his paper. This question and answer episode provided a substantial amount of information on the non-fictional half of Bouchercon's theme.

THE PROGRAM WAS INTERRUPTED AT THIS POINT with a surprise guest, Al Nussbaum, who had robbed nine banks and spent seventeen or so years in prison, and whose name still occupies four or five prominent spots in the FBI Building's tour guide spiel. His commentary covered cases of police manufacturing fingerprints for evidence and the paradox of prison's being not a correctional institution but a graduate course in organized crime.

The largest panel by far, *Washington in Mystery and Suspense*, probed authors of mysteries set in Washington — Warren Adler, Carolyn Banks, Rod MacLeish, Patricia McGerr, Barbara Mertz, and Daoma Winston — about what the readers in 2080 would learn about 1980 from their books, how fictional crime compares to true crime in D.C., and what trend future writers of Washington mysteries might take.

Spy vs Spy provided the meat of the non-fictional theme of the convention, giving retired CIA agent Walter Pforzheimer and FBI agent John Gaskill equal time at the microphone. Pforzheimer, whose lifelong career in intelligence began in the military in 1942, has a mouthwatering collection of intelligence literature, some of which, notably some fascinating secret dispatches from George Washington dating from the War of Independence, he brought for attenders to see as an illustration of historical "faction," that grey area between fiction and non-fiction.

Gaskill, who claimed the hardest thing about his talk was keeping it

unclassified, did a bit of debunking which was not warmly received by espionage fans. The dichotomy between real and fictional spies lies in the fact that counter-intelligence is not done by individuals like James Bond, but by Mr. Average, the unspottable, unglamorous, mundane blender; the work he does is similarly unglamorous, time consuming, and often unrewarding. Writers necessarily have to jazz up spies to be James Bonds because a book about real espionage and counter-intelligence would not sell.

GOING UNDERCOVER: STINGING THE UNDERWORLD, a slide presentation with a lively, off the cuff narrative by Robert D. Arscott, now president of Sting Security, Inc., was decidedly the most popular presentation of the weekend, if only because it refuted so many of the previous speakers who had said that the real world won't sell and that real detective work is drudgery. In addition to this cheering reaffirmation, the humor and adventure of the famous Sting undercover operation against East Coast fencing rings, which led to the conviction of 565 career criminals and the recovery of $5,500,000 in stolen goods, was as good as a fictional movie or book in transporting the audience to a different and exciting world; this was welcomed since the program, stressing non-fiction as it did, was often low on escapist content. Discussion of *Going Undercover* continued well into the doorprize drawing.

The theater piece mentioned earlier was William Gillette's *The Painful Predicament of Sherlock Holmes*, "a fantasy in about one-tenth of an act," first performed in 1905. It consists of a comic sequence in which 221B Baker Street is invaded by a woman so garrulous about her problem Holmes can't get a word in edgewise; in fact, in the end he disposes of her without having uttered a sound.

CO-CONSPIRATORS BLAU AND LELLENBERG had been waiting in suspense all weekend for something to go wrong, and when it finally did, it proved to be a windfall. For *The Reporter as Detective*, with former newsman James Grady and Gregory Macdonald, the third panelist, Scott Armstrong, of the *Post*, failed to appear. The discussion continued with just the two, Grady describing a reporter's job as looking for truth, and, having found it, having to prove it's the truth. To do this, he, as a reporter, found himself acting like a detective, waiting for people, watching them, doing the same unglamorous, time consuming, and often unrewarding research, and using tricks to get information to the point where the amount of deception in the search for truth almost violated his conscience. Macdonald delineated the

decline in the quality of reporting since the 1960's. ("Young man," he was told, "go out and have fun and write about it, and if you end up cut and bleeding on the sidewalk, call the office.")

Most reporters these days are journalism majors who put "too much academia on the front page," don't check secondary sources and so print vacillating and contradictory stories, and aren't in touch with the stories happening out on the street. "People are mysteries," he concluded, as the darkened room hushed, absorbed in this exploration not only of reporters as detectives, but of the motivations of the two men on stage in writing mysteries. The solutions to each of us are elusive, Macdonald continued, but the truth seekers — work daily towards that solution. The only difference between a reporter and other truth seekers is that to a reporter *everything* is a mystery.

It is easy to see how a voice from the contemporary press would have disrupted this gentle, philosophical flow of thought, and by the end of the panel the delinquent had been totally forgotten.

THE AUDIENCE DISCOVERED THAT THIS WAS NOT THE END of such a high level of thought. Following a break long enough to thread the projector, the startlingly best chosen film of the weekend, *Call Northside 777* (Twentieth Century-Fox, 1948), was screened. James Stewart plays a reporter who reopens a fifteen year-old shooting case, first entirely skeptical of the man's innocence, and finally risking the man's only chance for parole in a rehearing in which he brings up enough new evidence to set the man free. The reporter's fight against people involved in the case, the owner of his newspaper, the legal system, and the government hearers illustrated magnificently the frustrations of the truth seeking reporter just expressed.

EDGAR ALLAN POE WAS PAID A FITTING TRIBUTE early Sunday morning with a panel whose speakers, Jack Sullivan and William Ryan, dealt respectively with traditional literary themes including Poe's influence on art, and the possibility of Poe's having died in 1849 not as a result of alcohol abuse but of a planned attempt on his life.

Sherlock Holmes: the Next Fifty Years invited Holmes expert Michael Hardwick, who, because of his faithfulness to historical facts and knowledge of Conan Doyle, had been commissioned to write *Prisoner of the Devil*, in which Holmes interests himself in the Dreyfus affair, to set right the bunch of impossible rubbish that had been coming out by way of pastiches. From his experience of present-day liberties with the Great Detective, Hardwick had only fears for Holmes'

character and integrity in the future.

In his Guest of Honor spot, Gregory Macdonald, whom Jon Lellenberg introduced as Ross, John D., and Philip, spelled out the debt that everyone in the room owed to Anthony Boucher. Boucher was the first man to conceive of criticizing popular mysteries, and in treating them as something worthy of criticism he legitimized the genre and us, its fans. Continuing, he dwelt on the value of good criticism, whether it be favorable or not, and described a three-rule canon of criticism which ended with the ideal that enough information should be provided in a review so that the reader can disagree with the critic's opinion at the end.

A FAREWELL WAS MADE BY THE CO-CONSPIRATORS, and Mary Ann Grochowski was invited on stage to tell the audience about Bouchercon XII to be held in Milwaukee at the Hyatt-Regency, Columbus Day weekend, 1981. Panels are already planned on hard-boiled detectives, sensational literature, and Sherlockian topics; authors to be discussed include Fredric Brown, August Derleth, John Ball, Robert Bloch, and William Campbell Gault. The theme, "Beer City Capers," will focus on mid-western authors and authors of mystery stories set in the mid-west; anybody interested in attending or participating is urged to write Grochowski for information or with suggestions at Bouchercon XII, c/o 2009 South 93rd Street, West Allis, WI 53227.

Most Bouchercon XI attenders are looking forward to Bouchercon XII mainly because of the quality of their Washington experience. The Co-Conspirators' planning always left more than realistic allowances for time, so that there was no hurried feeling. The beautiful program book they compiled, macabrely illustrated by John Linton, is a definite keepsake. They also provided for such considerations as danish, juice, and coffee to be served in the lounge Saturday and Sunday mornings; a stack of lists of nearby restaurants, their locations, service, kinds of food and drink, and price ranges were always available at the registration table; and to have the bar open from about 8:30 a.m. "until no one is left standing, including the bartender," quipped Blau. Rushing around behind the scenes, clarifying situations, preparing panelists, and keeping attenders well informed, the two men saw very little of the program they worked so hard to produce; as Lellenberg said during a short breather, "I don't have time to attend a convention." For all this they deserve a standing ovation from everyone who basked in the group-wide glow of kind treatment and enjoyment that weekend. ●

They were waiting for him. They dragged him into the darkness and punched him in the kidneys. He almost vomited. They let him lie on the gravel, gasping for breath. "Occasionally, we have to put out a second notice," one of them said gently. There wasn't going to be a third!

The Squeeze

by MICHAEL CASSUTT

DICK BRANDT TOOK THE ELEVATOR TO THE SECOND FLOOR of the Plaza Antigua Building, where his Sun Plumbing and Heating Company had its offices. It was a quiet Saturday morning in Albuquerque and all the other offices in the building were closed. Aside from a Chicano janitor polishing the glass doors of the lobby, there was nobody else around. Brandt was grateful for that.

Sun's offices took up half the space on the second floor, facing east toward the mountains. Brandt had insisted on that because he liked the view, but this morning he ignored it.

He locked the doors behind him as he went into his office. Sitting down at his desk, he winced at the bright sunlight. His flight from Las

Vegas had gotten in just after dawn. He was tired and unshaven, and was working up a champion headache.

He dialed his lawyer's number and heard two rings that got answered by the click of a phone mate. Crayne's voice said, "I'm very sorry, but I'm not home at the moment. If you'd like to leave a message — "

"If you're not home at seven-thirty in the morning, *you're* in trouble," Brandt snapped. "Answer the phone." He wasn't the sort of man who easily lost his temper, but he was tired and afraid.

The phonemate finished its message, beeped, and waited patiently for him to record. He hung up and dialed the number again. This time Crayne answered. "Sorry, I forgot to turn that thing off when we came in last night. Hey, aren't you supposed to be in Vegas right now. Hell, you should be toddling off to bed with some hook—"

"I got screwed early this time, Bobby."

"You didn't call me to tell me the gory details — "

"I lost a lot of money last night." He kept his voice calm. He didn't really believe it yet.

Crayne laughed. "So? Did you leave your checkbook at home?"

"Bobby," Brandt said patiently, "I lost eighty thousand bucks."

"Oh. Jesus."

"Yeah, and all the holy saints."

"How the hell did something like that happen? You know when to quit — "

"You're goddamn right I do!" His simmering anger suddenly boiled out. "I was set up. I hit them for almost ten thousand last night, you know, at this place, Mr. K's. I went back a little later to play some roulette with the winnings, and I had a couple of drinks. *Two* drinks . . . and I just sat there. I let it all ride for almost an hour and didn't do a goddamn thing about it."

"Something in the drink?"

"No fooling. I don't know what it was. It screwed me up enough so that I was like a zombie, but when they shoved this marker at me to sign, I signed it. I could write. I didn't know what I was writing, though. I went back to my room and puked, and it wasn't till like two hours later, when I went through my pockets that I saw the marker. I didn't say anything to anybody. I got out of the hotel — left everything behind — went to the airport, and here I am."

"I didn't think they did stuff like that in Vegas."

"Look, if Uncle Sam plays as dirty as he does, why should a bunch of punks be any better. Tell me what to do, Bobby. You're the legal wizard."

"Well, it's obvious that the first problem is cash. How much, off hand, can you come up with."

"I thought the first problem would be to sue the bastards."

Crayne paused, then said. "Well, as you said, this isn't the U.S. government you're talking about here. Besides, from what you've told me, it's your word against theirs. You've probably pissed away any evidence you had."

"Well, I have about three thousand dollars in the bank — really saving for a rainy day, right? A couple of hundred here and there. *You* know what I've got better than *I* do, man."

"Insurance policies?"

"Not mature enough to do much good if I cashed them in."

"The cars — "

"Leased."

"The townhouse." Crayne coughed. "You'd get a lot more than you paid for it, prices like they are around here."

"Yeah, but I still owe most of it. I wouldn't clear more than a few thousand dollars."

There was a long silence from the other end of the line. "I don't have all the papers I need here, Dick. Let me call you in a bit. I've got to look some things over."

"Okay." He hung up and sat back in his swivel chair, angry and sick. He considered himself an honest man. He liked business and he liked the idea of making money, but he'd never played fast and loose with taxes or anything else in his business. It never paid off. He'd started his company after three years selling for someone else. He didn't want to go back to that — especially not because of some crooked casino manager who decided to boost receipts during a slow week.

The phone rang. It rang three times before Brandt reached out and picked up the receiver. "So what's the verdict?"

"We've got to amputate," Crayne said. "You'll simply have to sell the business, take the money and give it to Mr. K's. I'm sorry as hell, but I don't see any other way."

"A garage sale won't help."

"You're taking this very well — "

"No, I'm not."

"Well, whatever. You don't have a choice, and neither do I. This is Saturday. Sunday and Monday are bank holidays this week. Tuesday morning you and I will have to start making phone calls. From what I've heard, the folks from Vegas don't like to wait ninety days."

Brandt clenched and unclenched his right hand. A little stiffness

there. "Look Bobby, thanks. I . . . I'll get back to you Monday sometime, okay? I need to do some thinking."

"Hey, Richard," Crayne said, "you wouldn't get any damn fool ideas about not paying, would you?"

"No, never." He hung up the phone and sat there with his head in his hands for a long time. Six years ago he and his wife had been living in a hundred and fifty dollar a month furnished apartment. They'd been driving a battered Volkswagen. It looked as if he was going back to that same place — only without his wife.

He got up and left the office.

HE TOSSED ON A BED THAT SEEMED TOO WARM and his doorbell was ringing. He looked at the bedside clock — three-thirty — and remembered what had happened. Who the hell was at the door?

Putting on a robe, he went downstairs to the living room. Sometimes the paperboy collected on Saturday afternoons — no, that was last week. He opened the door.

Two young men faced him, one sandy-haired, one dark, both looking as friendly and cleancut as the young Mormons who often passed through town on their summer ministry.

"What can I do for you?"

The one with dark hair spoke. "You're Mr. Richard Brandt?" Brandt nodded. The young man grinned and extended his hand. "I'm Jerry Danforth and this is Mark Russ. We're with Only Collections of Las Vegas."

"Sent by the friendly folks at Mr. K's Casino."

"Please don't slam the door, Mr. Brandt."

He hadn't intended to slam it, but realized that he *had* tightened his grip. "Why don't you come in and sit down and we can talk about this." He would have to face the situation sooner or later.

"Thank you," Danforth said. He and Russ made themselves comfortable. Brandt did not offer them drinks.

"You're not exactly what I expected," he told them.

"You mean we're not thugs?" Russ said, speaking for the first time. He had a high-pitched, youthful voice.

"Since you put it that way, yes."

"You've been watching too many Charles Bronson movies," Danforth said. "We work for people who are businessmen, not criminals. Our job is to collect monies due, and to give you a receipt."

"No arm-breaking?"

"Really, Mr. Brandt."

"Well, that's very gratifying. And I'm sure you'll be happy to know

that my attorney has already been informed of the . . . situation, and will be initiating proceedings on Tuesday." He badly wanted to ask them if they approved of drugging customers, but did not. He needed time. "I assume we'll be able to discuss this matter further . . . then."

Danforth smiled. "Excellent, Mr. Brandt. We wouldn't have bothered you on a Saturday afternoon, but — " He spread his hands.

"You skipped town," Russ said. Neither of them was older than thirty.

"Quite slickly, too," Danforth added. "You did not bother to check out, you left your clothing and your rented car. I'll tell you honestly that we expected to have a much tougher time getting in touch with you."

"Tracking me down, you mean. I did have tickets for Rio — but I needed a new photo for my passport, and the shops were closed." Danforth laughed politely. Russ just sat there.

"We won't impose on you any longer — "

"What happens if someone — hypothetically speaking, of course — if someone decides not to pay."

"There are a number of possibilities," Danforth said. "In some cases we will initiate our own legal proceedings, requests for extradition, that sort of thing. But we've never found it necessary."

"I can guess why not."

"Please, Mr. Brandt. We just *stay* with you until you decide to pay your debt." He cleared his throat. "In fact, we will be outside your door until you do pay. I'm afraid that we'll be going with you *wherever* you go, until you pay."

"That must become uneconomical after a while."

"You must remember the size of the debts we're collecting, Mr. Brandt. Besides, I've noticed that we never have to accompany anyone for very long. It's an awkward situation."

"I'm sure it is. Well, I will be seeing you gentlemen." They stood up.

"It's a pleasure dealing with someone so understanding. You have no idea — "

"Oh, I think I do." He didn't smile.

"We'll be right nearby," Danforth said.

Brandt closed the door on them.

BRANDT SPENT A GOOD HOUR WONDERING how he could transform himself into Charles Bronson, or Clint Eastwood, or a reasonable facsimile. He was getting the squeeze, a modern version without the baseball bats and dark alley — but the same squeeze nonetheless.

He hated it. But what could he do? Charles Bronson might burst out of the house with an M-16 blazing, mowing down the mobsters, but Brandt didn't even own a gun. And mowing people down would not solve his problem. He needed a new way out, and he didn't have one — yet.

He cleaned up, fried a steak (might as well enjoy it while you've got it) and after a quick dinner, went out to his car.

Danforth waited in the hall, walkie-talkie clipped to his belt. He started to say, "Good evening," but stopped when Brandt strode by without a word.

He had two cars, a jeep and a B.M.W. The latter was a smooth riding, comfortable car, but he didn't know where he'd be going. He started the jeep.

As he pulled out of his garage he saw a yellow Pinto waiting for him. Danforth was getting in. Brandt had to laugh when he saw the Pinto. The boy's bosses were businessmen all right. And all businessmen watch the overhead.

Saturday night in Albuquerque sounds like the punch line to a bad joke, but to some extent it was true. Compared to a New York or a Los Angeles there was little night life. Normally Brandt would have gone out to dinner with a female friend, but tonight he would be alone, except for his two shadows, and at the mercy of Albuquerque.

There was a "combat zone" on the south side of town near the air base. Brandt avoided the area, except for an occasional venture to see the latest shocking film. Tonight, though, he would explore it.

He parked his jeep on a side street and didn't bother to lock it. The Pinto pulled in behind him.

He went into The Elite, a bookstore specializing in "Triple XXX!" paperbacks, films, magazines, toys and novelties. He spent a good half hour browsing in the racks, past titles like *The Arena Women* and *The Bike Bastards*, and what a sign proclaimed was a "Rare Classic of Erotic Literature" — something called *The Tides of Lust. Wash me away*, Brandt thought.

For seventy-five cents he viewed a poor quality color film involving two athletic young women with an electric toy of uncertain gender. He surveyed The Elite's "extensive" selection of bondage items. He was getting bored, and hoped his two shadows felt the same.

The proprietor of the store was a bearded middle-aged man. He asked Brandt if there was anything in particular he could help him find.

"Just looking."

"We're all looking. But listen, this isn't a pickup joint — " He had

lowered his voice, trying to be inconspicious.

"Maybe you can help me," Brandt said. "Those two guys over there." He nodded toward Danforth and Russ, who had planted themselves just inside the front door. "They're hassling me a little, you know? Vice, I think."

The proprietor shook his head. "I'm sure you can understand. Vice leaves me alone, I've got to leave them alone. Sorry."

"Thanks anyway." Brandt went outside, followed by the two collectors.

Next door there was a theater called The Empress which billed itself as "The Gay-est Theater in Town!" Brandt bought a ticket to the next show, *Men in the Jungle,* and strolled into the lobby. He watched Danforth awkwardly buy tickets "for two," then hurry back to Russ, who had gotten into a discussion of some sort with a willowy young man wearing jeans and a leather vest.

Before going to his seat, Brandt called to the collectors. "Listen, I don't want to see you two holding hands in here."

He stayed for four hours.

HE WAS UP BEFORE SIX A.M. SUNDAY MORNING, shaving and dressing for church. He and his reluctant companions hadn't gotten home till after one. Brandt wondered where they slept, and how well.

A rumpled-looking Danforth was waiting outside the door again as Brandt left. "Can't be sleeping late on the Lord's Day," he said cheerily. "After a night of sin, it's best to be quick in seeking forgiveness."

He took the jeep again and headed to the west side to St. Bernadette's on Martha Street. The yellow pages told him there was an early Spanish language Mass.

The few parishioners were scattered among the rear pews. Brandt took this as an invitation to parade to the front row, Danforth and Russ following.

In spite of the small number of attendees there was a high percentage of communicants, and the service dragged on till after seven. When it was over, Brandt waited in his pew until the church was empty, lit a candle at a stand near the altar, then stopped to chat with the little priest, who was outside with the early arrivals for the next Mass. He introduced himself to the priest, and loudly pointed out his two companions, identifying them as "mobsters."

By seven-thirty he was in the foothills east of town at the Universal Church of the Holy Spirit on Cardenas. The Universalist building looked a lot like a converted garage, and the lack of ventilation and the

state of the interior decorating confirmed it, to Brandt's mind. He found a seat right in the middle of the sweating congregation. His two shadows remained near the open door at the back of the church.

When the two-hour service was nearly over, Brandt got up and moved off to one side. The pastor was asking for brothers and sisters to come forward and dedicate their lives to Christ. Danforth had closed in on Brandt, thinking, perhaps, that he might be trying to get away. As soon as the collector was close enough, Brandt gave him a tiny shove, hollering, "You say you want to take the pledge, brother? Do it now!"

A shove was all it took. A husky Universalist deacon grabbed Danforth and hustled him into the center aisle, where, in company with two teenaged girls and an older man, the collector pledged his soul to the Savior. Visibly angry, Danforth withdrew in a hurry, only to see Brandt enjoying the spectacle of salvation. Russ stood behind the man, stone-faced. "Amen, brothers," Brandt told them.

He attended two more lengthy services that Sunday, at the Full Gospel Church on Twelfth Street and at the Sandia Brethren of Christ Church on Utah. He had planned to attend a meeting of the Fourth Ward Latter Day Saints, but miscalculated and arrived in the middle of the service. Undaunted, he drove across town again, stopping only to fill up with gas, found a Benedictine Chapel and said five rosaries while he knelt in the darkness.

The Yellow Pinto with its two passengers went with him everywhere.

They didn't get back to the house until midnight.

ON MONDAY MORNING HE WAS UP JUST AS EARLY, a little tired but ready for another day of the squeeze.

He drove to the south side again, had breakfast in a greasy diner, then sat on the steps outside the Telephone Pioneers of America Museum waiting for it to open. Once inside he leisurely traced the development of telephony through the museum's working exhibits. Danforth and Russ were apparently feeling less ambitious this morning. They waited outside in the Pinto.

By sunset Brandt had visited the National Atomic Museum, and had driven eighteen miles north of town to see the Coronado State Monument.

On the way home he stopped at a drive-in to take in a triple feature: *It Came from Outer Space, Ride With the Devil,* and *The Green Slime.* He parked the jeep and peeled back the roof for a better view, then went to the concession stand.

Russ and Danforth were waiting for him when he came out.

They quickly dragged him into the darkness. He had an old stiff knee, a gift from the Army, and it made him stumble. Russ hauled him up by the collar and punched him in the kidneys. Brandt almost vomited. They let him lie on the gravel, gasping for breath. "Occasionally we have to put out a second notice," Danforth said gently.

Brandt managed to roll over and sit up. "Is this . . . how state licensed . . . officers . . . act?"

"Don't push your goddamn luck," Russ hissed. They went back to the Pinto.

Brandt remained sitting until he felt good enough to get up. He walked slowly back to the jeep, secretly satisfied through his pain. The two clean cut collectors weren't so clean cut after all.

He was glad he knew that for sure.

He had to stay for all three movies before he felt up to driving home.

THE RINGING OF HIS TELEPHONE WOKE HIM soon after nine the next morning. It was Crayne.

"I thought you were going to call me yesterday."

"I got a little hung up."

"Well, that's okay. When can we get together."

Brandt shifted on the bed and wanted to cry from the pain in his back. "I . . . ah, I'll call you later today. I'm not feeling very hot this morning."

"Is everything okay?"

"Yeah," he said. "I just . . . you know, hung one on last night. I got a little depressed."

"I understand. Well, I can keep myself busy this morning. But *call* me, all right?"

"Yeah, Bobby." He hoped so.

He showered, then dressed in gym shorts and an old robe. There were no real weapons in the house, but he did have an expensive carving knife with a tough blade. He put it in the sharpener and thought: *what am I going to use?* He took a bottle of Seagram's out of the cupboard and a bottle of valiums, too. Then he went to the bathroom and got a roll of white athletic tape. Sometimes he had to wrap his knee. He was ready now.

He tore off half a dozen long strips and stuck them on the backside of the front door. The roll went in his robe pocket while he crouched by the door and listened to the voices outside. Russ *and* Danforth. He considered his chances: he could take Danforth (that Army hand-to-hand training would finally be put to use) but Russ? No way, not in a

fair fight.

Well, who said he had to fight fair?

He slid the knife into the waistband of his shorts, at the back, making sure the robe was open and loose. He opened the door and smiled. "Come on in. I'll be ready in a couple of minutes."

They hesitated, but came inside anyway, Danforth first, saying "I hope there are no hard feelings — " Danforth passed. Brandt looked right at Russ, closed the door, and kicked the second man squarely in the groin. Russ bent over. Brandt had his knife across Danforth's neck. Danforth had sensed enough to keep still. Brandt tore two long strips of tape off the door and put on around Danforth's hands and the other around his mouth. He shoved the collector face down on the couch.

Russ was on his knees, starting to move. He froze when Brandt turned on him. The second collector received a better trussing. Brandt didn't want him going anywhere. He pushed Russ into a chair facing Danforth.

Brandt ripped the tape from Danforth's mouth. It must have hurt but the collector didn't wince. He said, "This is ridiculous, Brandt. We check in with Mr. K's every four hours by phone. If we miss a call you *will* see the enforcers. Now can't we — "

"Shut up!" Brandt yelled. He checked both men for guns.

"That's not necessary, Mr. Brandt. We're not licensed in this state." True or not, Brandt found no weapons. He *did* find a packet of papers in Danforth's jacket pocket: his receipt. Freedom.

"Well, what happens now?" Danforth asked. "I have no plans to sign that under duress — "

"I'm going to give you the same freedom of action your bosses gave me," Brandt said. He got the bottle of Seagram's and the valium and brought them into the living room.

He mixed four of the pills into a tall glass of the whisky, then set the full glass on the table next to Danforth.

"I suppose you want me to drink that."

"Yeah. It's sort of crude, but I can't afford the finer drugs like Mr. K's can. Besides, I haven't had the time . . . "

"Well, I'm not going to drink that — "

"You're going to," Brandt said, now standing behind Russ, "Or I'm going to cut off your friend's ears."

Danforth merely stared, then shrugged.

Without any great hurry, Brandt grabbed Russ' left ear and sliced off the tip. Russ tried to scream through his gag.

Danforth's face was red. "Good God!"

"I'll turn him into something out of *Star Wars* unless you drink that down."

He put the glass in front of Danforth's face. After a long moment the collector nodded, and drank.

AN HOUR LATER HE HAD REPEATED THE PROCESS ONE MORE time — without further mutilation of Russ. "Now," Brandt told Danforth, "please sign the receipt and mark it paid in full."

Danforth's head lolled like that of a man extremely drunk. He was slumped on the couch. Brandt slapped him a few times and dragged him to the table. "*Sign it.*" It took a long time, but eventually he got Danforth's signature — as a duly-licensed officer of the state of Nevada — on the correct line. Brandt took one copy, along with both Danforth and Russ' driver's licenses, scribbled a note to Crayne, and put the whole package in an envelope addressed to his lawyer. He made sure Russ, at least, could see what he was doing. Danforth was barely conscious, so Brandt dragged him into the bathroom and made him vomit. Then he cleaned up Russ a little, though he had no plans to untie him any time soon. The man looked like a wounded animal.

When Danforth was able to walk, Brandt marched him and his partner out to the jeep and had them get in back. He drove five blocks to the post office and put the envelope in the big collection box outside. They waited thirty minutes, until it was picked up. Then Brandt drove them back to the house. He parked by the Pinto.

"Here's the program," he said. "I mailed the receipt and your I.D.'s to my lawyer along with a note explaining how we came to an agreement. He will take that evidence to the police if I don't call him tomorrow."

"We can't go back without the money," Danforth said.

"Maybe you could explain to the folks at Mr. K's how I doped you. I'm sure they'd understand, or wouldn't they?" He was enjoying this moment. "Well, I don't care what you do. I'm legally clear. You've got the keys — just get out of here."

He cut Russ loose and Danforth ungagged him. They both got in their car. Brandt wanted to say something else — he wanted to apologize for what he'd had to do to them. But he remembered what they'd done to him, and what they might have done later. They didn't deserve an apology. All he could say was, "Good luck. You'll need it."

The Pinto pulled out onto the street. They could go one of two ways: north to catch the westbound freeway to Las Vegas, or south to hit the southbound and Mexico.

The Pinto turned south. ●

That was not his real name, of course. It was only after one of the little girls got hurt that they started calling him that. And then he caught another girl. And another. And another. Something had to be done to stop him.

The Toucher

by STANLEY WIATER

I ONLY REVEALS THIS WHEN BOYS THE LIKES OF YOU starts to getting ideas about girls the likes of me. I know it is popular talk all about that the bigger a girl becomes on certain areas of her tops and bottoms, the littler our brains becomes, but that ain't always truth, though sometimes I will declare some of us like to act that it is.

Which is why I carry this small leather pouch in my lady's bag whenever I'm none too sure about the gentlemanly intentions of my present company.

A good-luck charm? You could say that, if you was one to go and believe in luck. I just believes in knowing what there is to knows, and when the time comes, how to rightly use what you knows. No sir, what's in this pouch used to belong to the Toucher.

Now, you never heard of him, and I don't think any of the menfolk knew him around here — least not by what we called him, as the Toucher. I was a sight lesser of age then, though my kin would say I was always pleasant to rest eyes upon. And I wasn't underdeveloped under the top of my head back then, neither. I don't deny I'm still developing in some of them other places, from the way I keep pushing through my clothes before I wears them out.

Anyways, when I was a little one, 'bout eleven, twelve years, I was still a mite older than my girl friends, and I don't mean just by calendar reckoning. Even then, I was interested in more than dolls, dressing up frilly, and seeing how many wrapped sweets I could make disappear in a sitting. Don't you laugh, but I actually desired to learn about things when I was small, and enjoyed sitting near the elders and listening to them tell grown-up talk about grown-up matters, and such. I figure they never gave me no mind, sitting so close to ear-shot — they

probably figured I didn't understand most of the adult talk they was speaking.

Well, some I truly did not — like discussing whether to bring in that electricity stuff on wires — but some I did. The few books and magazines I came across in the attics and sitting rooms helped me a little, but not always much. And what I was learning in the school then couldn't help a blind coalminer stumble. But like I says, I did like to listen; I enjoyed trying to puzzle out the things we little ones was not supposed to be interested in. Or be able to understand right off and then refigure what they really mean.

Anyhows, it was late one summer that the Toucher came into our lives.

THAT WAS NOT HIS REAL NAME, OF COURSE NOT. If I tells you his Christian name, you'd mayhaps have heard of it, it being the same as some of his relations that still live on abouts the vicinity. He was a real person, mark for certain he was, and he had come to this town to visit with these relatives of his.

He was the quiet type, as you might have figured. He didn't have to do anything while he was here, on accounts of he was just supposed to be visiting, and none of us knew where he had comes from or what he did while he was back there. Mayhaps he had to come here 'cause of things that had gone on before in his home town. He didn't look like no coal digger's son, for certain. But naturally, the grown-ups never told us a thing, one way or the other. And most of us just thought he was another new grown-up, kind of nice looking, kind of quiet, like I says.

It was only after Mary Louise Jennings got hurt by him that we started to call him by that name.

I suppose "hurt" is not exactly the true and proper word, not seeing she was cut up or shot or run over or anything like that kind of hurt. But she came running to me near twilight that muggy August day, with her eyes real red and puffy from crying out all her tears, and it was a long, long time before she was able to cry again after. Truth was, she'd been too afraid to go to her folks after it happened, and seeing how her and the other girls kind of looked to me as understanding things they did not, she drew out for me the whole reoccurance of the sad events.

I told her then what I figured had happened to her, and calmed her into not worrying, that certain things had been left untouched so she wouldn't have to go to Doc Fitchatt or the pastor about anything unless she really wanted to. She was still unsure if she should tell her folks

what this man had done to her, but I warned her that the man — the Toucher — would go and deny the sad event, and then might be fit to call Mary Louise a liar. And worse things than that. I told her just to keep it to us girls, and hope real, real hard that such a sad occurance would not reoccur again.

But you know that, except for some finicky weather, things don't change all that much during the long and dry summer days up here. And nights.

THINGS WAS QUIET FOR A FEW WEEKS, and we had good times about; swimming, camping, going to the dances overseed by chaperones. But you know too, sometimes people don't always choose the chaperones too smartly — the Toucher happened to be one of them that was overseeing the dance held at the school assembly hall. I was home that night with a poison sumac rash I should've had the fair sense not to obtain in the first place, but that was how I myself was not there.

Like the Toucher was.

Leaving out the grimy details, it then so happened that Debra Ann Marples was chasing fireplies out back that night when he went to chasing her when nobody was about. And caught her. Considering the indecent condition her lacy Sunday best dress was in when she shows it to me the following morning, I knew then that the Toucher had pleased his hands and fingers a whole lot. His mouth too, Debra Ann said, who to this day can't let anyone kiss her there.

Debra Ann told me she had fibbed that a big raccoon had startled her, and she'd fallen down and spoilt her dress that way, and her folks had believed her. She knowed too that her family would be severely taken in hurt and embarrassment if they really had refigured the truth, and also because grown-ups seemed to like the Toucher so much who didn't know what he was really like, that they mightn't not believe the clear truth either. She believed and agreed with me, though, after I told her about Mary Louise, that she was still okay deep inside, and there was nothing on the outside which would for a long time show she had ever been touched like that.

Now sure, I was getting worried myself meanwhiles, having this kind of bad knowledge filling my head and not having anyone, young as or older than me, to let off with some of the pressures I was getting put on me. By then I knew what the Toucher was doing wasn't right or natural, but didn't see how I could tell anyone about it — anyone who could put a halt on his doing it anymore, that is. But he was hurting my

friends, that was clear for certain, and I didn't like it at all.

Or him.

SO WE BEGAN TO PLAY TOGETHER MORE AND MORE OFTEN, in the manner that we didn't go around by ourselves alone as much like we used to do. We never knew when the Toucher would be around, seeing as he didn't have no job or missus or anything that tied him to being someplace for sure at any particular time. He could walk around anywheres, be out at all hours, and was still always grown-up respectable, being as we also never saw him at Miss Olivia's sportin' house or near any of the gin mills and saloons. While we was at the age where most folks still looked at us as little girls, and not as girls who were slowly growing up into blossoming women. So we didn't have to act overly respectable and timid-tame either, and could wanders about pretty much where we pleased without anyone worrying where we was or if we was out alone.

So, when Abigal Carathews was out picking wild flowers for her momma's birthday, it was one of those times when she was alone. And when the Toucher just happened to have been trailing her for awhiles — all the way from the main road out to the fields on Old Man Carter's property.

He had her out there in the tall grass for several hours, at least that is how long Abigal said it seemed like when I went to visit at her house after not seeing her outside for a fair number of days. She had told her folks she'd gotten ahold of a summer sickness, and since school was out anyways, they hadn't been too upset about her malingering in bed for awhiles in case she was just making it up out of whole cloth her being unhealthy in the first place.

None of us had what they nowadays call a "hygienic education" then, and Abigal, she was ascared of what had happened, but not as ascared as she would've been if she had understood what the Toucher probably was truly after, but only found relief instead with us young ones. As I says, the reading I did on my own, and the big ears I would grow whenever my folks or other grown-ups thought they was alone, taught me more about such personal things than anybody I'd ever talked to or had told to me. Personal things about girls *and* boys, so don't think for a silvery moon minute I am unawares why you asked me to walk out all this way just because the band's taking a breather.

Well, we was all getting pretty bad frights by now, and it was decided to let every girl in on what had really happened to Abigal and the others, so that they could be on their guard against the Toucher from now on. They all didn't understand right off what it was they had to be

'fraid of, and a couple of them thought the man was fair looking and kind of nice, and said they didn't understand what they was supposed to be ascared of if they ever found themselves alone with him anyhows.

Trouble there was, I didn't knows enough about regular menfolk to explain what they was like, let alone a man who wasn't at all regular in his womanly desires.

Those who'd been touched now took to carrying knives and razor shaving handles hawked from kitchen drawers and their daddies' dressing tables. Most of the other girls in town did too, seeing how four of us was awares of what was going on, and we all couldn't be capable of making up such a nasty and terrible tale if some parts of it was not near to truth. And we had to tell them the Toucher never went back to the same girl twice, so it wasn't those who had been touched who had to worry, but those who had not.

THAT SUMMER, OUR KINFOLKS NEVER NOTICED NO CHANGES in any of us, but that's the way it is with grown-ups, who just 'bout ignore your living existence until you do something they don't wish to see or hear tell about. But we was afraid, we purely was, and we carried sharp things in our ladies' bags, and in our pants and dress pockets; things that could hurt back if someone came too close with their touching. And we didn't play much out of doors any time, though we had several weeks of playing out of doors weather still due us.

My daddy had been working on the porch of our house during that same time — this was before he got sent overseas to fight — and he had sent me into town to pick up a carton of newfangled roofing nails he had ordered. I would've taken my bike, see, but one of the tires was newly flat, and I hadn't gotten around to fixing it, so when my daddy sent me on the errand, my own two feet was the main source of transportation in getting there.

Now, our town has not growed all that much since these events took place, so you don't have to strain your brain too far to imagine how quiet things can get when it's too hot for anyone but a young tyke to be doing business downtown when everyone else is inside drinking beer or catching an extra twenty winks. I remembers it seemed more like a Sunday morning than a Saturday afternoon, is how still and quiet was everything.

Anyways, the Toucher must have been watching before I entered the hardware store, and knowed I would cut through the back alleyway as a shorter route back to the main road and home. Because he was standing there — big as life like they says in the magazines — his grimy smile and hands ready for me just as I reached the deserted lot behind

the store.

I'd never seen him so close up before, and at first look he was not nothing scary to look at. Truth to tell, you look a little like him yourself in this moonlight. But anyways, I knew who this man truly was, and I was remembering what he'd done to my friends, so I sure as hell wasn't going to be fooled into letting him get me on the ground so he could do whatever he wanted to my untouched person.

But I had the carton of nails, which was heavy, but not that heavy, sitting inside the paper bag. I don't recollect what told me to do this, but when the Toucher started to bend down and reach for me with those long fingery hands, I swung that bag of nails as fierce as I could against his face. He went down to the dirt without uttering a word, and I wasn't sure if I had knocked him proper or just stunned him like, so before he could get to his feet again I swung that bag of nails a few more times against the back of his skull just to make for sure. The carton of nails had broken open by now, and with the bare nails sticking out all wet and stained, the bag felt heavier by the time I was done, as I recalls.

THAT WAS THE LAST AND FINAL OCCASION the Toucher ever bothered any of us, and being it was some summers back, you probably had yet to move here to knows about the big scandal which followed and about all the questions that went unanswered. Unanswered for the grown-ups, that is, who never suspected any of us when it was finally over.

You see, we each got something to remember the Toucher by, me and the girls I got together quick and gathered in that deserted back lot while he was still breathing. We didn't bury him alive, if that's you're thinking. None of us are like that, and you're more the fool to think such a think if you do. But like I says, we all got things from him to remember what he had done to us, before he was finally put away in the ground by the grown-ups.

Which is why I carry this pouch when I foresee my beaus might try something a few beats too fast for my maiden heart.

Take a look inside.

That was one of the things he touched us with that dark, long ago summer. You see now? He ain't going to be touching any girls anywhere anymore with what we let him retain. I got the biggest part 'cause of my being the only one who knew what counted the most. I forgets if all the others have kept theirs, but last time I gossiped with Mary Louise, she still had his left thumb. And Debra Ann his tongue . . ." ●

"I killed them," the man said. "I killed them all, just like I killed those Chinese Reds back in Korea. Just as I'm going to kill you!"

When the War is Over

by EDWARD D. HOCH

COWLAND WAS BUSY DUSTING THE SHELVES of bronze cupids, and was not immediately aware that someone had entered his little shop. When at last he heard the clearing of an impatient throat, he put down his feather duster and went through the beaded curtain to the front of the shop. The man he saw at the counter was vaguely familiar, with close-cropped gray hair and a ruddy complexion.

"Can I help you today, sir? We're having a clearance on a number of items. Twenty percent off."

The man's thin lips curled back in a sort of smile. "You're Jimmy Cowland, aren't you?" The words were slurred, as if by drink.

Cowland didn't like people turning up from the past. especially people he couldn't quite place. He frowned and considered denying his identity. But the man obviously knew him and he gave a reluctant nod. "That's me — Cowland's Antiques."

"Don't you remember?" the gray-haired man asked, suddenly insistent. "Korea? Twenty years ago? The night we took hill 219?"

"Major Burns!"

Yes, it really was old Burns. Cowland recognized him now, and realized he hadn't really changed that much over the years. Even with gray hair and a face grown more weathered, he was still Major Sam

Burns with his dreams of storming up Korean hillsides like some reincarnation of Teddy Roosevelt. For Major Burns war had always been just a step removed from a boy scout hike, an extended holiday among the beds and bottles of a far-off land.

"It's me, in the flesh!" He shook hands vigorously, his crooked smile revealing the lost tooth which had never been replaced, the lost youth he still seemed to seek. "Imagine finding you running an antique shop of all places! I thought you were going to open a bar."

"I tried that first," Cowland said in an effort at hospitality. He motioned toward the back room. "Come in and visit for a few minutes, Major. It's been a long time."

"That it has!" Major Burns followed him through the beaded curtain. "How'd you end up in a place like this, Cowland?"

"It's a living."

"Good money in it? Conning old ladies with this junk? You got a good location, though. I'll give you that."

Cowland shrugged and sat down, motioning the florid Major Burns to the other chair. "What brings you to this part of the country?"

"Traveling, my boy. For a few years after the war I had a good thing going on the lecture circuit. People paid good money to hear me talk about Korea. But then this Vietnam thing came along and everything turned sour."

"Can I get you some coffee? It's all I have, I'm afraid. I don't get many visitors back here."

"Nothing better than coffee? How about a shot of something?"

"I've got some brandy," Cowland admitted reluctantly.

"Good, good! Get it out, man!"

COWLAND PRODUCED THE HALF-EMPTY BOTTLE and dusted it quickly. He remembered that the Major had always been a drinking man, even back in Korea. "I just have one glass," he explained apologetically. "But I don't feel like anything now myself."

"You never were much of a drinker," Major Burns said, tipping the bottle until the amber liquid ran sparkling into his glass. "But you were a damn good fighter. I remember you were at my side when we went up Hill 219 that night. Remember the rain? And all that damned mud?"

"I remember."

"This is good brandy. It warms a man's insides." He ran his tongue over dry lips, moistening them with the liquor, in a gesture Cowland remembered from the old days. "Ever see any of the boys around?"

"No. Just Greer once in a while. He lives across the river."

"I guess they're all pretty scattered," Major Burns said sadly. "I was thinking about a twentieth reunion, you know."

"Oh?"

"You remember that night, Cowland? Just twenty years ago next month. God, what a night! It was the greatest of my life, I think. Better than my wedding night, believe me. Remember the way the rockets lit up the sky, and the tracer bullets?"

Cowland nodded slowly, thinking back to all of it. "I remember," he repeated.

"I still got all my medals. I used to wear them when I spoke. You still got yours?"

"They're around somewhere, I guess."

Major Burns cast a disparaging eye around the shelves. "I don't know how you can find anything with all this junk around. Is there any money in it? Where are all your customers?"

"I have a few, enough to make a living."

"Statues. What are all these cupids for?"

"I put them in the window around Valentine's Day. They're something of a trademark in my advertising."

Major Burns poured himself another drink from the bottle. "We've both come a long way from Hill 219, haven't we, boy? Me giving speeches and you selling antiques. We did a lot of crazy things back in Korea. But I got my medal for that night, and that's what matters."

Cowland grew uneasy as he saw the bottle tipped up once more, before the glass was even empty. "How's your wife?" he asked.

"She walked out on me. A long time ago, ten years ago."

"I'm sorry."

Major burns dipped his head. "You needn't be. She was no good. Right from the beginning she used to laugh at my speeches and complain about my drinking. She didn't understand me."

Cowland glanced at the wall clock over his desk. "I have to be closing soon. I have a bus to catch."

"Closing? Don't you want to talk about the old days? About the night we won our medals? Did I come all the way over here for twenty minutes of small talk?"

"Why *did* you come here, Major?" Cowland asked suddenly, surprising even himself. Somehow the drab charade must be brought to an end, somehow the truth must be told. "You didn't just happen into the store and recognize me. You just said yourself that you came all the way over here. What for? You've probably never been in an antique store before in your life."

"You're right," Burns said with a sigh, running a damp hand

through the gray bristles of his hair. "I went to see Greer and he gave me your address."

"When did you see him?"

"Just this afternoon. I've been looking up all the old boys, for the reunion. I told you about the reunion, didn't I?"

"Yeah, I guess you told me." Cowland felt very tired.

"Twenty years since that night we went up the hill."

"Look, Major," Cowland said, the anger growing within him until he could no longer bottle it up. "You never went up that blasted hill, and you damn well know it! Greer and I and the rest of us got that medal for you, and some of us died doing it!"

Major Burns tried to speak, but all that came out was a lingering sigh of pain.

"You were dead drunk when you were supposed to be leading us into battle. You ordered the attack and then collapsed with your bottle. And we covered for you! We kept covering up for you even after the war, when you went around the country giving your damned speeches. We made you the hero you are, and we could destroy you just as easily!"

Burns rose from the chair and staggered back against the shelves as if Cowland's words were physical blows. It was like Korea all over again — the drunken Major trying to cope. "No, don't say that . . . "

"You were always a better soldier drunk than sober. You could win every battle in your imagination."

Burns was silent, as if gathering his strength. Then, carefully shaping each word, he said, "Yes, you would betray me with your wild stories, Cowland — even after twenty years. Just like all the others. That's why I sought you out, why I got your address from Greer." His eyes glazed with a film of drunken unreason.

"Major — for God's sake!"

"I've seen all six of them, Cowland — Keeley and McBarne and Schuster and Fergus and Wainwright and Greer. And you know what I did to them?"

"No."

"I killed them, Cowland. I killed them all, just like I killed those Chinese Reds back in Korea. I killed Greer just this afternoon. And now you're number seven. You'll never tell anyone those wild stories about me because you'll be dead!"

"Major — !"

Cowland saw his hand gripping one of the bronze cupids, and he waited no longer. He sprang at the man, tearing the statue from his grasp, swinging it in a reflex gesture of defense.

AS SOON AS HE HEARD THE VOICE ON THE OTHER END of the phone line, he asked, "Is this Greer?"

"Yeah. Who's this?"

"Jimmy Cowland. I hate to bother you . . . "

"That's all right, Jimmy. What's up?"

"Did Major Burns come to see you this afternoon?"

"Did he ever! Drinking all the time, bragging about that Korean thing! He asked for your address. Hope you didn't get a taste of it too!"

"Afraid I got more than a taste. He said he was going to kill me. Said he'd killed six others, including you."

"He fed me that same line," Greer said, his voice crackling on the line. "It was the Korean thing all over again. He was too drunk to hurt a fly. I let him rant for a while and then he left. Maybe he thinks he did kill me, the same as he thinks he went up that hill with us."

"Yeah," Cowland said. "Thanks, Greer. I just wanted to make sure you were all right."

He hung up the phone and sat for a long time staring down at the body of Major Burns. *Too drunk to hurt a fly.*

He wondered how he would ever convince the police it was self-defense. ●

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One of two close calls could have been accidents. But three close calls made it clear what was happening: someone was trying to kill him!

Demolition, Inc.

by BILL PRONZINI and BARRY N. MALZBERG

DANIELS WAS CROSSING THE EMPTY STREET, making his way from the diner to his car after finishing an early dinner, when the gray sedan with mud-covered plates tried to run him down.

He saw the dark shape of it just in time and flung himself out of the way; hit the street on his right shoulder and rolled up over the curb, bruising his left cheekbone on a sharp piece of concrete. The sedan swept by so close that he could feel the wind of its passage. Then there was a squeal of brakes, a flash of taillights as Daniels scrambled up into a kneeling position, and in the next moment the car vanished around the far corner.

Daniels got slowly and painfully to his feet and stood staring at the dark intersection for several seconds, muttering savage words under his breath. He slapped at his clothing then, went back across the street. Inside his car he rolled up the windows, locked the door, and sat there trembling.

Smith, he thought angrily. Smith again.

This hadn't been the first attempt on his life in the past few days. First there had been the concrete block dislodged from the roof of the Bristol Building which had missed him by a fraction; then there was the failure of the brakes on his car three days ago and the near-fatal accident on Old Canyon Road — and the subsequent discovery that the brake lining *might* have been tampered with. One or two close calls could have been accidents. Three close calls left no more doubt that it was a clear-cut case of intended homicide.

And there was only one person who could be out to get him: Ivan Smith.

THE WHOLE THING WAS CRAZY, THAT WAS WHAT IT WAS: Daniels still couldn't believe it was happening to him. The accidental death of Smith's brother wasn't *his* fault. How could it be? All he'd done was to show up at the condemned Harcourt Building at eleven a.m. two weeks ago, as he and Demolition, Inc. had been hired to do, and plant explosives inside it and set them off under police sanction.

How could he have guessed that the nightwatchman was an alcoholic and still inside the building, lying passed out behind some crates in a rear storeroom? How could he be held responsible for the man being demolished along with the rest of the building?

Well, *Smith* held him responsible and that was all that counted now. First, he'd tried to get Daniel's license revoked by the city for negligence. Then, when that failed, he'd tried to discredit Demolition, Inc. and Daniels's character by dredging up that old business from three years ago, the one about Daniels paying kickbacks to city officials for certain special contracts. And when that didn't work, the attempts on Daniels's life had started.

Smith was a nut case, all right, Daniels thought as he sat waiting for his hands to stop shaking. A real homicidal lunatic, like you read about in the papers from time to time. He was also inept, just like his drunken brother, the nightwatchman, but the law of averages was in his favor: sooner or later, if he was allowed to keep on trying, he was bound to succeed.

Daniels did some ruminating. He could go to the police, of course, but he didn't have any evidence — no eyewitnesses to any of the attempts, nothing at all — that Smith was out to get him. A falling block of concrete? Possibly gimmicked brake lines on his car? An attempted vehicular homicide by a gray sedan with muddied license plates? It all sounded pretty thin, even to Daniels. And that meant the police were likely as not to label him as some kind of paranoid nut himself.

Besides, too much publicity and too much police attention were things he didn't care to have, not with the kind of moonlighting activities in which he was involved. The secret work of Demolition, Inc., such as supplying quantities of explosives to representatives of foreign governments and certain private individuals, could be very embarrassing to Daniels if they ever came out into the open.

So he was left with only one choice, as far as he could see: he would have to do something himself about Smith.

Which meant killing Smith before Smith killed him.

Daniels lit a cigarette and thought about that. He thought about it for several minutes, with a good deal of calculation. Murder was a chancy business, no question about that. But if he was careful, if he took great pains to do just what Smith was trying to do — make the murder look like a simple if tragic accident — then it seemed to be a good bet that he could get away with it. Contrary to what the police would have you believe, there were large numbers of unsolved crimes in this country every year; and murder was the most prominent among them. All it would require was cunning, caution, and a certain amount of ingenuity.

All right, Daniels thought, and nodded to himself. His hands were steady now. But just how was he going to do it? In murder, as in the demolition business, you couldn't afford to play odds that were any less than one hundred percent. Both required a precise, exacting discipline . . .

IT TOOK HIM TEN MINUTES OF FURTHER RUMINATING to come up with a plan that satisfied him. At the end of that time he nodded once more, smiled grimly in the darkness, and then started his car and headed it crosstown toward the small building which comprised the office and warehouse space of Demolition, Inc.

When he got there he entered and took a small amount of plastic explosive — the kind that was illegal to possess in the United States — from the hidden storage room in back. He put on a dark sweater he kept in the shop area, filled his pockets with half a dozen selected tools. Then he returned to the car and drove north, toward the suburb where Smith lived.

He had done a little research on Smith when the man first started to harass him. Smith was a salesman with some sort of supply company, unmarried, living alone in a small house on a quiet cul-de-sac; his nearest neighbor was a hundred yards away. His hobby was reading books — things like encyclopedias and "how-to" books on just about any subject you could name. That was all Daniels had been able to find out, except that Smith apparently had an obsessive mind on some subjects. Like the death of his drunken brother. Like murder.

It was too bad all this had to happen, Daniels thought as he drove. For some reason — a beginning release of tension, may be — he felt philosophical. The interconnections between men who should be strangers, the painful collision of personalities due to accidents, always bothered him. In different circumstances he and Smith might have gotten along well or not at all; it was only coincidence which had drawn their lives together. He sure hadn't *meant* the man's brother

to be on the scene during the demolition of the Harcourt Building. A more careful sweep of the premises might have turned him up, but Daniels had been working on a tight schedule; he'd had a meeting planned for that afternoon with a couple of prospective explosives buyers from Central America, on a deal that hadn't worked out too well but through no fault of his. He'd been as surprised as anyone when the watchman's body was found in the wreckage.

Yes, it was too bad — but what could you do? Protect yourself, that was all. Self-defense. Not murder, just simple self-defense.

He drove to within a block of Smith's house, parked his car in the shadows cast by two large oak trees growing inside a parklike lot, and made his way to the house on foot. From behind another oak tree he studied the place. Dark, empty-looking. It didn't seem likely that Smith had gone to bed yet; the time was only eight-thirty. Which meant that he hadn't returned yet and the house was as deserted as it looked.

Perfect.

Daniels left the shadows and crossed to the front porch. There were lights on in the nearest of the neighboring houses, but trees screened the properties; the odds against anyone seeing him were all in Daniels' favor. Just to be sure that Smith wasn't home, he crept up onto the porch, rang the bell and then jumped down into the bushes to watch and wait. Nothing happened, inside or out. The house remained dark and silent.

Daniels waited another couple of minutes before he went around to the rear. The back door was locked, as was the small window beside it; but the latch on the window yielded to one of the tools in his pocket. He slid up the sash and climbed over the sill into heavy darkness.

Using his pencil flash to guide him, he made his way through the house and down into the basement area where the furnace and hot-water heater were located. Then he took the plastic explosive from his pocket and from its container, and moved up to the water heater.

Five minutes later, Daniels retraced his steps through the house and eased out through the rear window, shutting it after him. When he got back into the trees bordering Smith's property he checked his watch. The time was 8:55. He settled down against one of the trees to wait.

SMITH RETURNED AT 9:20. THE GRAY SEDAN CAME PROWLING up the hill, parking lights on, and stopped in front of the attached garage. The license plates, Daniels noticed, were now clean and visible. Smith got out of the car to open the garage door — an ungraceful, portly man in his fifties, who looked neither obsessive nor homici-

dal. Another few seconds and both Smith and the car had vanished inside the garage and the door had been secured from within.

Daniels stood and watched the house with a good deal of intensity. Five more minutes passed. Ten. Twelve —

Even though he was waiting for it, the explosion was startlingly loud. The flash seemed to light up the entire house and most of the surrounding neighborhood; the windows burst outward, pieces of debris sprayed the night. Flames began to soar and flicker inside the demolished house.

Quickly, but with the same caution as before, Daniels made his way back to where he had parked his car. There was a good deal of activity in the neighborhood — voices shouting, people running toward Smith's house; no one paid attention to him. And he would be long gone before the police arrived.

AS HE DROVE AWAY, staying within the legal speed limit, he found himself thinking — philosophically again — of the irrationality, the unreasonable nature of life. If there was anyone at fault for all of this, it was Smith's late alcoholic brother. The fool should have been out of the Harcourt Building by eleven a.m. that morning; he'd been told of the demolition proceedings but must have forgotten in his stupor.

Daniels shook his head. The truly guilty, he thought, never pay. Which was part of the further irrationality of life.

When he reached his own house, on the far side of the city, he used the automatic opener clipped to the sun visor to lift the garage door, then drove inside. He shut off the engine, the headlights. And got out of the car, reaching back inside to automatically close the door again.

Something moved in the bushes alongside the garage entrance.

Daniels stiffened, staring over there. But before he could do anything else two dark shapes glided into the garage and converged on him, one of them holding something which might have been a blackjack upraised in one hand.

Daniels tried to run then but it was too late, much too late. The blackjack descended, struck him a glancing blow that knocked him sprawling to the concrete. Dimly he heard one of the men say in Spanish-accented English, "Start the car. We will make it seem an accident, just as before. Carbon monoxide poisoning."

And so the last thought Daniels had before he slid away into darkness was that life could *really* be irrational and unreasonable sometimes.

It hadn't been Smith who wanted to demolish him.

It was the people from Central America . . . ●

A warm summer's day. Two old friends on the golf course. What could be more peaceful?

A Friendly Rivalry

by PATRICK SCAFFETTI

BEN DRAINED THE LAST OF THE COFFEE FROM HIS CUP, slipped a quarter tip under the saucer, and announced, "It's eight o'clock, Eli. Let's go."

Eli nodded, and together they rose from their chairs. The clubhouse was empty except for a haggard-looking waitress with brittle, henna-colored hair who was sluggishly wiping a table on the other side of the room.

"You boys golf well now," she called out.

"Will give it our best," Ben said. "See you later, Maggie."

Maggie watched the two men leave, a half-smile tugging at the corners of her scarlet mouth. Like Mutt and Jeff, she thought. Both men were in their late sixties, but there the similarity added. Ben was tall and rotund with a head as bald as a billiard cue. Eli was short and scrawny. He had a massive head of thick white hair. Ben's leathery skin was tanned a deep brown, while Eli had a pale, almost translucent complexion. Even their voices were different. Eli was soft-spoken, always polite, whereas Ben boomed out his words in a deep, gravelly voice.

Staring after them, Maggie chuckled. In their gold shorts, Ben's legs looked like a pair of fire hydrants and Eli's resembled spindly,

hairy sticks. Maggie shook her head in amusement, then returned to wiping the table. It was good to have Ben and Eli back for the summer.

OUTSIDE, THE MORNING AIR WAS ALREADY BEGINNING to grow warm, and the sky was a cloudless, eggshell blue.

"It's going to be a real scorcher by noon," Eli observed.

"Yep," Ben agreed. He grabbed the handle of his golf cart and pulled it toward the first tee. Eli followed a few steps behind.

The sleepy-eyed starter didn't get up from his bench as they approached.

"Morning, Jacob," Ben said heartily.

"Morning, Ben, Eli," the man said, making a notation on the sheet before him. "Good to see you guys again. As soon as I spotted your names on the schedule this morning, I knew that summer had finally arrived."

"Well, summer mornings were made for golf," Ben said. "When the dew is off the green, that means it's already too late."

"Have a good winter?" Jacob inquired.

"Some ways yes, other ways no," Ben said. "I was down at my condominium in Florida from October until just last week. Great weather, but the missus passed away in April."

"Sorry to hear that," Jacob said.

Ben nodded his head somberly. "Those things happen. You've got to roll with the punches."

"You winter in Florida, too, Eli?"

"Nope, couldn't afford it," Eli replied. "I stayed right here and battled the snow like all the other poor folks."

"Well, you've got a few months of sunshine and golf ahead of you now," the starter said. "You two have been coming to this golf course for how many years now?"

"This will be our thirty-second year," Ben said. "Used to be we'd come only on Sundays when we were still working. But, since we both retired in '71, we've been coming every decent morning of the week."

"It's rare for a friendship to last as long as yours has," Jacob said. "You guys have been a team for a mighty long time."

"Since elementary school," Ben said. "Eli and I both graduated from high school in 1929, then went to the same college of pharmacy. In fact, we each opened up our own drugstore about six blocks from each other. Eli and I have been best buddies for quite a while. You might say a friendly rivalry has kept us together."

Jacob whistled softly. "You must know this course like the backs of your hands."

"We know its every nook and cranny," Eli smiled. "But that doesn't seem to bring down my score any."

"That's because you've been making the same mistakes for over thirty years," Ben said. Already perspiration was beginning to glisten on his bald head.

"You're probably right," Eli said. "And we'd better tee off. I don't want any golfers pressing us from behind."

"No need to worry about that," Jacob assured him. "You two must be the earliest golfers in the area. The next foursome isn't scheduled to tee off till eight thirty."

BEN SLID THE DRIVER FROM HIS BAG, TEED UP A BALL, took one practice swing, then hit the ball straight and high onto the fairway.

"Nice drive," Jacob said. "You must have gotten in plenty of practice down in Florida."

"Some," Ben said. "Now, show us what you can do, Eli."

Eli teed up his ball and swung. The ball soared over the fairway and landed off to the right, several yards short of Ben's.

"You'll never learn to hit a straight drive," Ben muttered. "Eli, you're living proof that you can't teach an old dog new tricks."

"You may be right," Eli said. "So long, Jacob." He and Ben grabbed their golf carts and headed out onto the fairway.

"Good luck," Jacob called after them.

"Thanks," Eli replied. "I'm going to need it."

Ten minutes later, the two men putted their balls into the hole on the first green.

"Give me a four, Eli," Ben said. "It's always a good sign to start the day with a par."

"I took a six," Eli said, writing their scores on the card. "An honest six."

Ben ignored the comment and strode to the second tee. Trailing him, Eli said, "That's an interesting term you used to describe our friendship, Ben. A friendly rivalry. There's a lot of truth to that."

"I guess there is," Ben said. "We've been paired off against each other in a lot of ways for a lot of years."

Eli nodded. "More ways than I care to remember."

Ben gave his friend a quizzical glance, then drew a cigar from his shirt pocket. He lit it, sending billows of smoke into the morning air.

"You've got honors," Eli said. "Go ahead and hit, Ben."

Ben walked over to the tee, keeping the cigar clenched between his teeth. After the inevitable practice swing, he sent his ball hurling into the distance. It came to rest far off in the center of the fairway, a white

speck in a field of green.

"Try to beat that one," Ben mouthed around his cigar as he stooped to retrieve his tee.

Once again, Eli's drive went off to the right and landed short of Ben's.

"Like I said before," Ben chuckled, "you can't teach an old dog new tricks."

"No, but you can open his eyes to the truth," Eli said.

The two men walked side by side out onto the fairway.

"Another par," Ben announced after the second hole.

"I thought I counted six strokes for you, Ben," Eli said.

"It was a four," Ben snapped. "Par."

Without answering, Eli recorded a four on the scorecard for Ben. He gave himself another six.

ON THE SIXTH TEE, BEN'S SCORE WAS 20, ELI'S 32.

"Our first game of the season," Ben said, "and it's the same pattern as it's been for years."

"You're ahead as always," Eli said. "You've always managed to keep the lead."

"Guess I have, at that," Ben grinned. "But it gives you something to shoot for, Eli. Keeps you on your toes trying to beat old Ben."

"Yes, it does," Eli murmured. In a louder voice, he said, "Let's sit down and rest for a while. I didn't have your opportunity to golf and keep in shape in Florida this winter. I'm feeling a bit tired."

Ben hesitated a moment, then said, "Sure. A five minute break won't hurt either one of us."

They sat down on a bench in the shade of a mammoth oak tree. The lush, well-tended golf course stretched out before them. Not another person was in sight.

"We've been in competition all the way back to high school," Eli said as though to himself. "And that's really the last time I ever came out ahead. I was on the swimming team, and you couldn't swim a stroke. You were always scared to death of water."

"Still am," Ben said. "That's why I'm not looking forward to the eighth hole. I feel shaky as hell shooting from that little island."

"That's the one hole I usually win," Eli said. "I think I've hit my best drives from that tee."

"Well, you've got the psychological advantage there. But we're not in high school any more, Eli. Swimming has nothing to do with our lives these days. And one good hole doesn't make a golf game."

Eli shrugged. "It's funny looking back on all the ways you've bested

me, Ben. Your grades in school were always superior to mine. But then you had Mary Agnes Kemp helping you along, writing papers for you, slipping you the answers on tests."

"I found out at an early age that it's easier to take the shortcuts," Ben said with a note of pride in his voice.

"At the college of pharmacy, you maintained a steady lead, too. I always wondered if your grades reflected actual learning or if those rumors were true. You know, a lot of people claimed that you were blackmailing one of the professors for high grades."

"It wasn't my fault that Dr. Reynolds had a few flings with certain coeds. Of course, he didn't want his wife to find out." Ben chuckled at the memory. "Hell, what man hasn't cheated a little? Dr. Reynolds was too concerned about the whole thing really. And all he did was to give me a few breaks to keep my mouth shut."

"Then, there's Louise," Eli said wistfully. "She was so beautiful, so kind. Losing Louise to you was the hardest defeat of all. She loved me, Ben, she truly did. Only you somehow convinced her that you needed her more than I did. You swept her off her feet and married her before she had a chance to realize what she was doing. I can tell you now, Ben, that I never stopped loving Louise. And I like to think she always had a special place in her heart for me. But now she's dead."

"I was the only man for Louise," Ben growled. "She may have liked you as a friend, but that's as far as it went. In fact, I sometimes think she loved me too much. She became possessive, stifling."

"She didn't like the way you ran after everything in skirts," Eli said. "She was faithful to you, and she expected the same loyalty in return."

"But she always forgave me," Ben said. "Always."

"Did you know that Louise and I corresponded while you were in Florida?" Eli asked.

"No, I didn't," Ben replied in mild surprise. "She never mentioned any letters from you. But we each had our own interests, went our own separate ways. I never bothered to keep track of what she was up to."

"Louise hated Florida. She hated the heat, the bugs, the sterile condominium. Were you even aware of her feelings, Ben?"

Ben nodded. "She never made any bones about how she felt on that issue. She didn't have the sense to recognize a good thing when she had it."

In a quiet voice, Eli said, "After losing Louise, no other woman really interested me again. I almost had the best, and, after that, second best just wouldn't do."

"You're beginning to sound maudlin, Eli."

"I'm entitled," Eli said. After a brief pause, he continued, "Your final victory over me came when my drugstore burned down in 1951. I was getting more business than you, Ben. My store was a success, and yours wasn't doing so well. Then, mine burned to the ground. I lost everything. The insurance couldn't possibly cover everything that went up in those flames. I was a broken man after that, and your store tripled its business. I suppose I should be grateful to you for giving me a job at your place, but I'm not. After being my own boss for so many years, it was hard to become somebody else's employee."

"I did good by you, Eli," Ben protested. "I paid you well."

"But it still wasn't the same. And there were plenty of people who believed the fire that wiped me out didn't start accidentally. Even the police suspected arson."

"That's madness, Eli," Ben said. "The past is over and done with. Forget it. Look to the future. Now, let's play golf, for God's sake. That's what we're here for."

Ben abruptly rose to his feet. He hit his ball without taking a practice swing. Then Eli approached the tee. For the first time that morning, Eli outdrove his old friend.

WHEN THEY STEPPED FROM THE GREEN of the seventh hole, Ben said, "I'll take a five."

"You got a seven," Eli said sharply.

"Seven? Maybe you're right. I may have miscounted."

The two men dragged their golf carts toward a large lake.

"We're coming to your nemesis, Ben," Eli remarked.

Ben made no reply. They pulled balls, tees, and drivers from their carts, then crossed a narrow wodden bridge leading to a small island which rose steeply from the center of the lake. The tee for the eighth hole was on the island.

Eli glanced at Ben and noticed the short, tense steps he took while crossing the bridge. "The water's awfully deep here," Eli commented. "You'd think they'd put rails along the side of the bridge."

Ben remained silent. Once on the island, he teed up his ball and hit. The ball stayed low and disappeared into the lake.

"Damn," Ben muttered. He pulled another ball from his pocket and drove again. This time, the ball arced smoothly across the lake onto the fairway.

When Ben moved away from the tee, Eli made no effort to take his place. "You're always so stiff when you drove from here," Eli said. "You act as if there's an audience watching you, but there's not a soul in sight."

"The water spooks me," Ben said. "Now, go ahead and shoot."

"In a minute," Eli said mildly. "I told you that Louise and I corresponded while you two were in Florida, Ben. What I didn't mention was she suspected you were poisoning her. She wrote me that in her last letter, along with the information that you'd started the fire in my drugstore. But before I could help her in any way, I received word that she had already died. You're a pharmacist, Ben. You could have killed her slowly, making it look like a natural death."

"You're crazy," Ben said, but his voice had a frightened, hoarse quality to it.

"I don't think so," Eli said. "I think you cold-bloodedly killed her, because you'd come to see her as a burden. She didn't want to winter in Florida any more. She threatened your fun, so you got rid of her."

Ben stared at Eli. "So why don't you go to the police with your insane suspicions?" he asked. "If you're so sure it was murder, why keep quiet about it?"

"Because I've decided to handle it in my own fashion, Ben. After all, I've got more than one score to settle with you. I slipped poison into your coffee back at the clubhouse. I'd say you've got fifteen more minutes before it begins to take effect. Just enough time for you to run back to the clubhouse for help."

Ben's eyes widened in sudden fear. "You *are* insane," he gasped incredulously.

"Perhaps," Eli said. "But that doesn't alter the fact that you'll soon be dead."

"What kind of poison did you give me?" Ben pleaded. "Please, Eli, tell me."

"First, I want to know some things. Did you kill Louise? Were you slowly poisoning her to death?"

Ben hesitated, then said, "Yes."

"Did you burn down my drugstore?"

Ben opened his mouth to speak, choked on the words, then nodded feebly. "Now, please, tell me the poison so I can get the antidote."

"I won't tell you."

Ben's face had lost its tan. It was deathly pale.

"You'd better hurry back to the clubhouse," Eli advised. "There's still a chance you might be saved."

BEN DROPPED HIS DRIVER AND BEGAN TO RUN. Eli slowly retrieved the discarded club and waited until Ben was half-way across the bridge. Then, he shouted, "Ben, wait."

Ben looked back just as Eli flung the golf club. It whirled in the air toward Ben like a baton out of control. Ben ducked and lurched to the side. With a hoarse cry, he toppled from the bridge and splashed into the lake.

Ben disappeared beneath the water, then broke the surface seconds later, choking and gasping for breath.

Casually, Eli strolled to the edge of the island and watched Ben flounder. "There was no poison in the coffee," he said. "Do you hear me, Ben — no poison, except for the poison in your own mind. You simply had a dizzy spell on the bridge, fell in, and drowned before I could get to you."

Soon, the surface of the lake was calm once again. With a sigh, Eli walked onto the bridge. In the middle, he dove gracefully into the lake.

A few minutes later, Eli dragged Ben's heavy body onto the shore. His rescue attempt completed, he turned and began the long, lonely trek back to the clubhouse. He looked quite calm and satisfied for a man who had just lost a lifetime friend. ●

STRANGE, BUT TRUE

In 1907 George "Big Fingers" Holland made elaborate plans for escaping from Sing Sing by tunneling under the prison to freedom, using a single spoon snatched from the mess hall during the evening meal.

The escaping prisoner had not tunneled more than six feet underground when the tunnel collapsed behind him, effectively sealing off any hope of return. There was no way to go but ahead, so he kept digging, occasionally detouring to get around rock formations too hard for his tiny instrument. In the darkness this made navigation uncertain. After six months of digging, George Holland had to admit he was hopelessly lost.

The peanut butter and jelly sandwiches he'd brought were soon used up, and he had to forage for food, eating insects and spiders. His one determined thought was to get to freedom.

At the end of two years he finally broke through to the surface in the cellar of a New York brownstone near the Hudson River, owned by an elderly lady whom he married. They lived happily ever after, and authorities were so impressed by George Holland's incredible feat they pardoned him and named a tunnel after him.

Which is how the Big Fingers Tunnel got its name.

MIKE'S MAIL

KEEP THE SHORTS!

Please, please do not remove the shorts! They are the reason I continue to subscribe to MSMM. My sister shares this opinion as must many others. If anything, I would like to see more short stories!

Fred Ebel
375 Palm Springs Dr.
Altamonte Springs, FL 32701

Our space is limited, particularly since we have a lead novel up front every issue and occasional stories that can be told only in novelet length. But I try to balance out the longer ones with a selection of short ones. So we'll keep our shorts.

A GREAT MAGAZINE

I enjoy reading MSMM immensely. I think the most enjoyable part of MSMM is the leading character, Mike Shayne. There are a few things I would like to know about the magazine.

1) How long has MSMM been in existence?

2) Is it possible to get back issues of MSMM? And if so, how?

3) Do you ever have short stories by these authors; Mickey Spillane, Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, Carter Brown, Ross Macdonald?

Michael Klein
830-46 Street
Brooklyn, NY 11220

P.S. You guys have a great magazine!

1) The first issue of MSMM was September 1956, and it was called MICHAEL SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE.

2) We have some back issues, but only from the past several years. What we have is available at ten dollars for six issues. Tell us what you have, and we'll send you some you don't have.

3) No. Some of these are dead and others are not writing short stories. But we do have stories by other name writers and by writers who probably will be name writers before long.

Thanks for the P.S. We try.

ENJOY

Sure am enjoying the NEW, NEW EVERYTHING! Including the serials, Letters to the Editor, and the chitchat! Thanks for your consideration.

Althea C. Hutchins
11214 107th St., SW
Tacoma, WA 98498

You're welcome.

YOU CAN GO NOW

I especially enjoyed the September issue, with one exception: YOU CAN GO NOW. I couldn't figure that one out. I'm sure there's a hidden meaning there, but I'll be darned if I can find it. However, the Mike Shayne short novel was first-rate, one of the best ever printed in MSMM. I remember reading THE CORPSE CAME CALLING some years ago. You know, those Mike Shaynes of the forties were really top-notch. I can't figure out why Brett Halliday never got the same recognition as Chandler and Hammett.

William M. Vatavuk
3512 Angus Rd.
Durham, NC 27705

YOU CAN GO NOW was one of those subtle, psychological yarns in which the murderer punishes himself mentally for the killing. (At least, I think that's what it was).

CRIMES IN OTHER TIMES

The crimes in other times issue was fabulous.

Michael Scott Cain
6633 Frederick Rd.
Catonsville, MD 21228

I thought it turned out pretty good. Most readers seemed to like it. Maybe we'll do another one.

MORE CRIMES

Thanks for MAYHEM IN THE MAGIC CITY. It brought me up to date on Phyllis' death. Also all the other stories from the past. They were all new to me. Please keep some short stories. They are just the right length for reading during a break or lunch. Keep up the great work.

Ed O'Donnell
602 E. Perry St.
Belvedere, IL 61008

The stories were new to everybody, Ed. Most of them were set in the past, but they were still new MSMM stories. And let me apologize here if I spelled your name wrong — and anybody else's in the Mike's Mail section. Handwritten signatures are sometimes difficult to decipher.

LOOKING GOOD

The magazine is looking good. I liked the two Phyllis stories, and the idea of a historical mystery issue was a good one. In the latest issue I particularly liked the story by John Lutz and thought Vicki Shaull Carleton had a funny new twist on an old chestnut — I wonder what Larry Shaw thought of it, though.

Jon L. Breen
10642 La Bahia Ave.
Fountain Valley, CA 92708

I haven't seen Larry for several months. Say, you don't suppose . . .

LOUZY

Any more issues like this and I'll have to cancel my subscription.

Ray Blake
6001 Idylwood Drive
Edina, Minn. 55436

This was the only dissenting voice in comments concerning our Crimes In Other Times issue. Enclosed with the brief note was a tear-sheet of the October table of contents with LOUZY written across it. Sorry you couldn't find anything in the issue you liked, Ray. Sorry you don't know how to spell LOUSY. Well, I guess now you do. So you see you got something good out of it after all.

REGULAR

The first MSMM I picked up was the now infamous April issue. Needless to say, it was the last for awhile. That is, until a friend forced me at knife-point to read *Looney Tune* in the August issue. An excellent first shot for Terry Black.

I broke down and bought the November issue, and am I glad I did. Another winner in the first-timer category from Vicki Carleton (*The Final Rejection).* Let's look forward together to much more from these two talented minds, Black and Carleton!

My personal favorites in the November MSMM are *Tough, The Final Rejection, Murder in Mind, A little Light Larceny.* Okay, so I'm hooked. You got yourself another regular, so there. Keep up the good work.

Dick Carstead
Box 22101
Lansing, MI 48909

Stories by Vicki and Terry will appear in future issues of MSMM, as well as stories by other talented newcomers and many of the pros we all know and love. So stick around. Exciting days are ahead. ●

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Mike Shamus

by FRED FREDERICKS

COME OUT OF THERE ONE BY ONE... WITH YOUR HANDS UP!
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WHO'S THIS?
LET HER GO! IT'S THE WELCOME WAGON LADY!
FRED FREDERICKS

Stiff Competition

BOOK REVIEWS by JOHN BALL

By far the most rewarding book we have enjoyed this past month is *The Scorpion Signal*, the latest in the series about secret agent Quiller and very possibly the best. The author is Adam Hall who, as everyone knows, is Elleston Trevor whose *Flight of the Phoenix* is a classic in the field of adventure.

This time Quiller is operating in Moscow where he is sent to find and bring out a British agent who may have been captured and interrogated by the KGB. To carry out his mission Quiller has to undergo the terrors of the Lubyanka prison himself. His subsequent escape, and the carrying forward of his mission, makes nail-biting reading even for hardened followers of the espionage genre. If suspense is your dish, then here is a top sample of one of the very best series going. (Doubleday, $10.00)

☆ ☆ ☆

The latest in the long list of new adventures of Sherlock Holmes is *Sherlock Holmes in Dallas* by Edmund Aubrey. In this new offering the Master is called upon to investigate the assassination of President Kennedy at the scene of that fearful crime. There is much of interest

in the book and Holmes' conclusions are well thought out, but unfortunately the whole thing is a fairy tale. As every faithful Baker Street Irregular knows, Sherlock Holmes was born on 6 January 1854 and Dr. Watson, who accompanies him on this adventure, was two years his senior, being born in 1852. While Holmes is still alive (his death would make headlines everywhere), at his extreme age it is beyond credulity that he would undertake a trans-atlantic investigation in such obvious vigor and health after the publication of the Warren Report. As a fantasy, a nice entertainment. (Dodd Mead, $9.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

The many readers who enjoy Catherine Aird will be delighted to know that this talented lady is available in two new offerings by Bantam. *The Religious Body* and *The Stately Home Murder* are now available for $1.95 each and better evening's entertainment would be hard to find. Inspector Sloan is on the job in both works and, as a special bonus, Constable Crosby, one of the most delightful individuals in the literature, is also on hand. *The Religious Body* concerns murder in a convent and a very good tale it is. Both of these are highly recommended.

☆ ☆ ☆

While on the subject of paperbacks, one of the finest, and funniest, books left us by Edmund Crispin is *Buried For Pleasure*. This delightful classic has just been made available by Perennial for $1.95. The scenes in the haunted rectory are in themselves enough to put this book in the not-to-be-missed category.

☆ ☆ ☆

Those who are fond of the much praised British author P.D. James will be happy to know that three of her books are now available in a single volume called *Murder in Triplicate*. It contains *Unnatural Causes, An Unsuitable Job for a Woman,* and *The Black Tower.* Our own preference is for the second of these titles. Miss James is at times highly realistic and some readers may find her work here a little depressing in *The Black Tower*, a book laid in a home for the mentally or physically disabled. However, she is a first class talent and handles her material well, even if at times it is somewhat grim. (Scribners, $14.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

Dell Shannon (Elizabeth Linnington) appears in two new offerings by Bantam: *Streets of Death* and *Felony at Random*. Lt. Mendoza appears in both titles. This lady is something of an enigma: she is a good story teller with at times a fine sense of style, but her police procedure, about which she writes so copiously, is appalling. It would do both her and her readers an enormous benefit were she to take even a week of her time to see how police activity is really done. If all else fails, we will be happy to arrange for her to visit the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department where police activity is carried on at a very high level indeed. These titles are $1.95 each.

☆ ☆ ☆

A series new to us is the Scribner Crime Classics; the first of these to cross our desk certainly lives up to the title of the whole line. It is *The Greene Murder Case*, which, while now considerably dated in context, has Philo Vance back in action. Remembering his once great popularity, a nostalgic look back at his detecting is likely to be a rewarding experience. *The Canary Murder Case* is also available in this same series. The price is $2.95 for the work at hand.

☆ ☆ ☆

The Money Stones by Ian St. James is basically a story of adventure based on the "big caper" idea. A Greek of uncertain background claims to own an island somewhere in the Pacific on which diamonds have been found. Under heavy secrecy he agrees to take two men there to verify his discovery, a financier who can raise huge capital, and a geologist to verify the discovery that has been made. The story is well written and interestingly told, but not a great deal happens until the end. At that time much of the exciting action in which the reader would like to participate takes place off-stage. The plotting is for the most part quite ingenious, but the final conclusion, as a story resolution, is subject to question. Some readers may well like it, others quite possibly may not. (Atheneum $9.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

A hardy perennial in the garden of famous mysteries is *No Orchids*

for Miss Blandish, a book that did much to make its author, James Hadley Chase, well known everywhere. A new edition is now available in paperback from Penguin priced at $2.50. It's nicely gotten up, but even at today's costs, a slightly larger type size would have been appreciated.

☆ ☆ ☆

This month's book about the mystery genre is *Secrets of the World's Best-Selling Writer*. The authors are Francis L. and Roberta B. Fugate; their subject is Erle Stanley Gardner. There are many examples of Gardner's technique and a number of interesting photographs. There is certainly no question of the great popularity Gardner enjoyed, and Perry Mason is a household word despite his failure to marry Della Street. (It wasn't his fault: he proposed to her five times and was refused each time because she didn't want to give up her job and she knew that as Mason's wife she would have to quit). Students of mystery literature and others interested only in the craft of writing will find this careful and detailed work of genuine interest. (Morrow, $12.95) ●

STRANGE, BUT TRUE

In the recently-discovered MEMOIRS OF ADRIENNE CONAN DOYLE, the authoress revealed the long-suspected truth about Dr. Watson, that the doctor was a woman whose real name was Joan Watson. Joan Watson was secretly married to Mrs. Hudson, Holmes' housekeeper, who was in reality a man and an accomplished swimmer after whom the Hudson River was named. Mrs. (Mr.) Hudson, insanely jealous of his wife, resorted to the female disguise so he could eavesdrop on Joan's rendezvous with the famous detective. As it turned out, his fears were groundless, for he soon discovered that Sherlock Holmes' name was a shortened version of Shirley Locke Holmes, and the two women had gathered merely to gossip and exchange recipes.

The annoyed Ms. Doyle attributes the literary sex change to editorial male chauvinism at its most insidious, and concludes with the rhetorical question: "Is nothing sacred?" To which we respond with the rhetorical answer: "Apparently not!"

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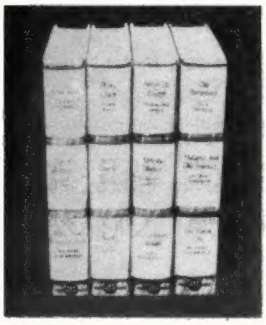

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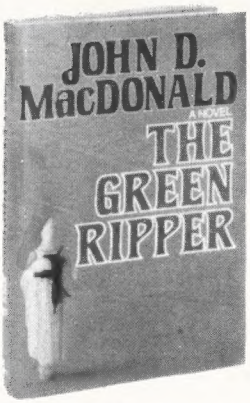

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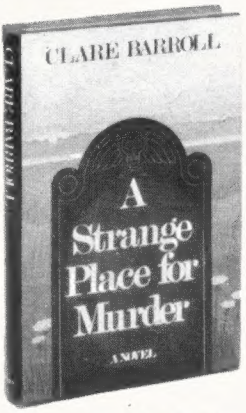

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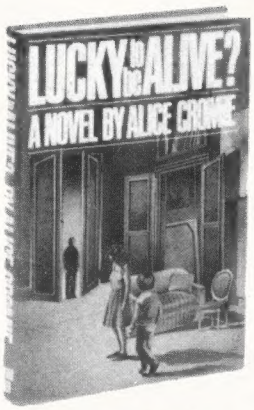

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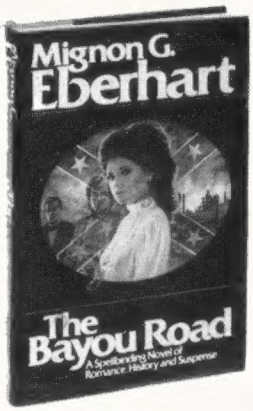

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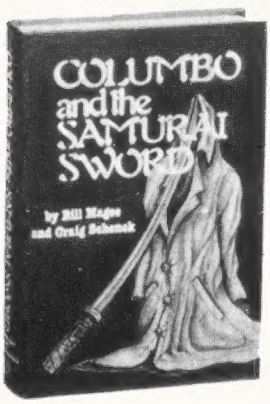

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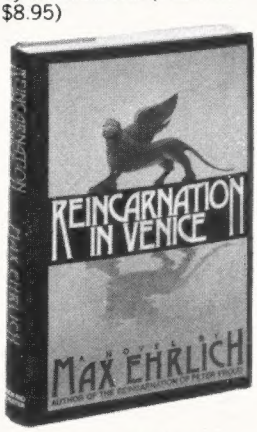

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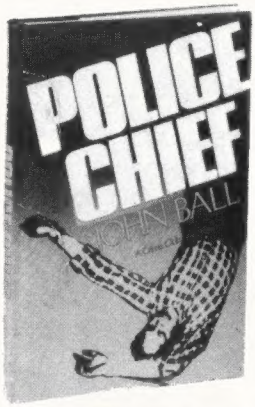

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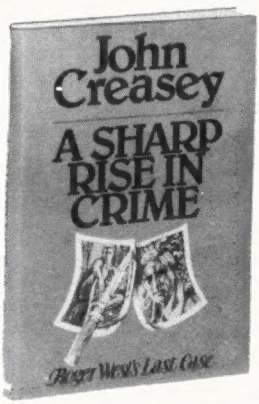

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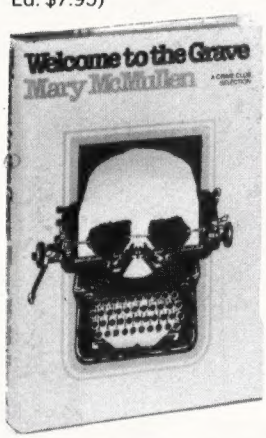

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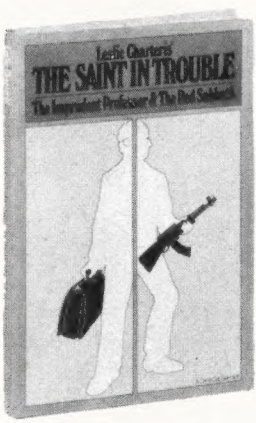

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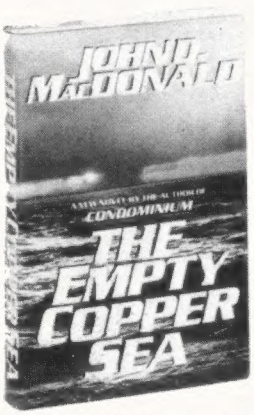

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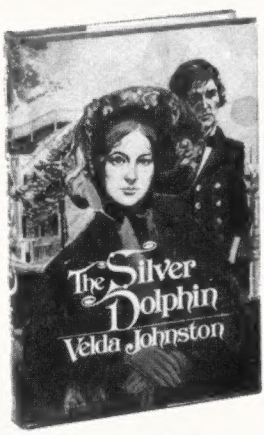

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